



International Pandemic Treaty Position Paper

FOUR PAWS

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International Pandemic Treaty

One Health and primary pandemic prevention: a holistic approach to humans, animals and the environment

On 1 December 2021, the World Health Assembly (WHA), decided to develop a convention, an agreement or other international legal instrument under the Constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO), in response to the global impact of the coronavirus pandemic. The purpose of this instrument is to strengthen international measures to prevent, prepare for and respond to pandemics, and to consolidate them on an international level. On 13 July 2022, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB) that was put in place for this purpose published an initial working draft¹. A conceptual zero draft is expected by mid-November 2022. At the 76th WHA next year, a progress report will be presented with the aim of adopting the instrument by 2024.

As the proposed **International Pandemic Treaty** represents an important step towards establishing a more resilient international health architecture in the fight against COVID-19 and other future pandemic threats, the content and scope thereof are of critical importance. FOUR PAWS, the foundation for animal welfare, believes that an international pandemic treaty should not focus exclusively on technical solutions from the field of secondary and tertiary prevention. Such solutions merely serve to prepare for the next pandemic, for example by increasing biosecurity, research and the development of vaccines or surveillance mechanisms. It is imperative that an international pandemic treaty also focuses on primary pandemic prevention measures and addresses the specific causes that favour the occurrence of pandemics. WHO member states must also advocate that the treaty be built on the One Health approach, as defined by the One Health High-Level Expert Panel (OHHLEP)².

In order to effectively prevent future pandemics, FOUR PAWS sees the need for urgent political action in the area of primary pandemic prevention. It is critical to expand the scope of prevention to the stage of interactions between human beings and animals because this is the interface at which zoonotic pathogens spill over.

For this reason, FOUR PAWS urges policy makers to take the following areas into account with regard to primary pandemic prevention:

- ◆ Reduction of animal products;
- ◆ Transitioning away from intensive agriculture and improving animal husbandry methods on farms;
- ◆ Prevention of human encroachment into wild habitats, mainly land use change and deforestation for agriculture and animal feed production;
- ◆ Strict regulation of trading and keeping of wild animals;
- ◆ Putting an end to fur farming and live-animal markets.



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1) Increased focus on primary pandemic prevention

The WHO report, “Managing Epidemics” (2018), differentiates between five phases in the incidence of infectious diseases: (1) Preemergence, (2) Occurrence, (3) Local Transmission, (4) Epidemic and (5) Pandemic³. However, Bernstein et al. (2022) recognized a sixth critical phase that was not considered in the WHO analysis, namely the point in time of pathogen spillover⁴. According to their view, pathogen spillover from animals to humans happens when anthropogenic activities disrupt the natural balance between ecosystems⁵. Since 75% of all new infectious diseases can be traced back to zoonotic pathogens⁶ – i.e. originate in animals – the analysis by Bernstein et al. is of major significance: **A focus on primary prevention by improving our relationship to animals and the environment will limit the risk of spillover and transmission of infectious diseases from animals to humans.**

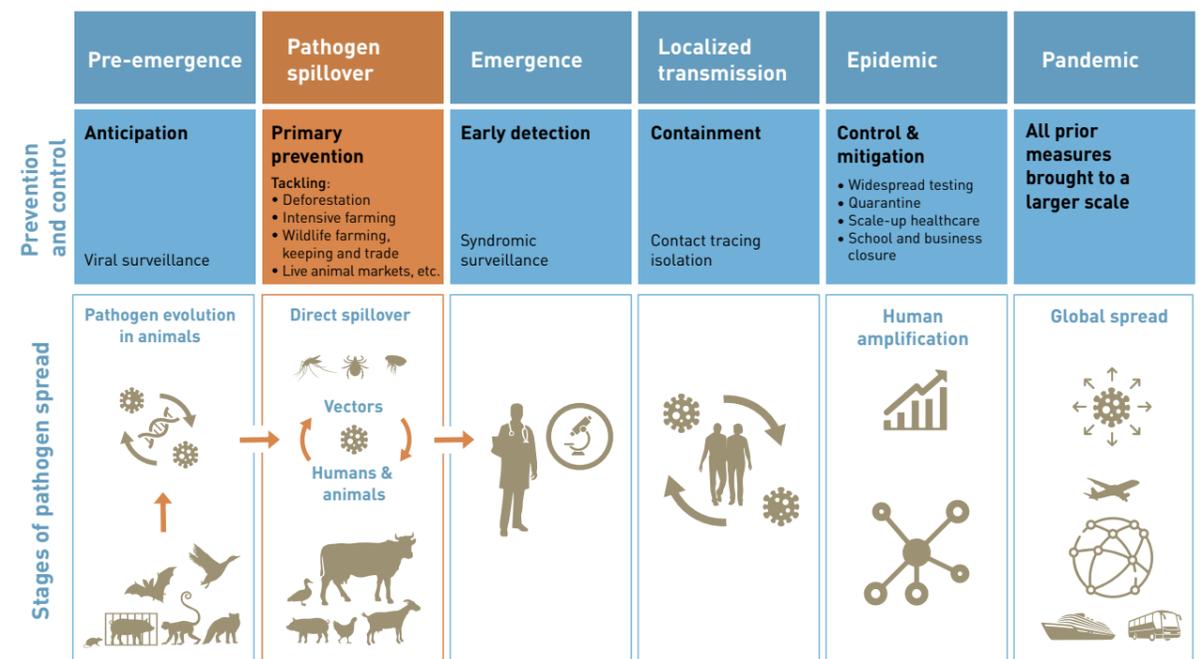


Image 1: Phases of Incidence of Pathogens, according to Bernstein et al. (2022).

Primary pandemic prevention measures promote the health and wellbeing of animals and the protection of the environment. They also contribute to the prevention of risky practices. Examples of such risky practices include keeping too many animals in high stocking density and poor conditions, extensive use of land and deforestation for the production of animal feed, or weak regulations on wildlife trade. A 2022 IUCN report validated the link between the global trend in large-scale intensive farming of pigs, poultry and farmed wildlife and the emergence of highly pathogenic zoonotic influenza and coronaviruses⁷. Reducing reliance on animal products, shifting away from intensive farming and improving husbandry, preventing human encroachment on wildlife habitats through agricultural land use and deforestation for the production of animal feed, strictly regulating the commercial trade and keeping of wild animals, and banning fur farms and live animal markets as well as protecting biodiversity and species would therefore help prevent the spread of pathogens and subsequent disease outbreaks⁸.

Such primary preventive measures limit the risk of pandemic emergence, thereby averting the high costs of mitigation following the transmission of an infectious zoonotic agent. However, at present, throughout the world, no more than USD 4 billion is spent annually on the prevention of spillover events⁸. By comparison: The worldwide costs of the COVID-19 pandemic currently amount to between USD 8.1 and 15.8 trillion⁹ – not to mention the loss of human lives. At the same time, it is estimated that measures for primary pandemic prevention, which tackle the causes of transmission from animals to humans, would only require an annual investment of around USD 20 billion⁴.

Combating the causes of the emergence of zoonotic pathogens, in an effort to protect public health, is the most sustainable and cost-effective investment we can make, and it supports global health and development outcomes at the same time. It is of paramount importance that an international pandemic treaty does not focus solely on secondary and tertiary pandemic prevention measures, such as vaccination campaigns, biosecurity measures, or pathogen monitoring, for which a significant amount of funding and resources are already allocated at present⁴. Thus, to be effective, the international pandemic treaty must prioritize primary pandemic prevention measures as explained by Bernstein et al. (2022) that significantly reduce the risk of zoonotic pathogen emergence, mutation, and transmission to human beings⁴.

Demands by FOUR PAWS

In terms of primary pandemic prevention, an international pandemic treaty...

- ◆ ... should explicitly recognise the role of food systems and intensive agriculture in the spread of pathogens and the occurrence of mutations.
- ◆ ... should include a commitment to establish and implement mechanisms for the promotion of sustainable, regenerative agricultural systems with ecological approaches that conform to the FAO's 10 principles of agroecology¹⁰ and which have a reduced impact on ecosystems. Implementation must include local population groups.
- ◆ ... should aim to explicitly recognize the role of trading and farming of wild animals in the spread of pathogens and mutations.
- ◆ ... should include a legally binding commitment for parties, that guarantees that they will not trade with or market wild animals bred in captivity, either domestically or internationally, without first having assessed the risks of such trade.
- ◆ ... should pose a complete import ban on wild-caught animals.
- ◆ ... should include a global commitment to eradicate live animal markets worldwide and support countries where the practice still exists, in implementing new measures to enable the ban.
- ◆ ... should include a legally binding commitment that guarantees that parties will end the high-risk practice of breeding, keeping, and killing animals for their fur.

2) One Health as the guiding principle of the International Pandemic Treaty

One Health is a collaborative, transdisciplinary, multi-sectoral approach that recognizes the relationship between animal, human, and environmental health. The definition by the OHHLEP, which was revised in December 2021, states: "One Health is [...] an integrated, unifying approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimize human, animal and ecosystem health [...]". Furthermore, this definition urges society "[...] to work together to promote welfare and address threats to health and ecosystems²." Animal welfare is considered an integral part of the OHHLEP definition.

This definition is officially endorsed by the so-called "Quadripartite", which comprises the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the WHO.

The One Health definition by OHHLEP must be incorporated into future national and international strategies to prevent, prepare for and respond to pandemic health risks and outbreaks of disease in all policy areas, in order to advance interdisciplinary and holistic approaches. Health mechanisms and processes have failed to some extent because they have not been based on a holistic understanding of the interrelationship between humans, animals and the environment. By means of cross-sectoral collaboration, sustainable solutions to health crises, such as pandemics, can be developed in a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach.

Demands by FOUR PAWS

- ◆ The One Health approach, as defined by OHHLEP, should become the guiding principle of the International Pandemic Treaty.
- ◆ The One Health approach, as defined by OHHLEP, should be officially included in national strategies as a guiding principle. Furthermore, it should be recognized, at both the national and international levels, that the One Health approach is not just a health concept, but a transdisciplinary, multi-sectoral approach that needs to be extended to other sectors.
- ◆ Legal coherence between existing environment and animal-related conventions, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity: (CBD), the Bonn Convention (Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals or CMS), the Washington Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC), should be reinforced and their existing provisions should be supplemented inline with the One Health approach.
- ◆ Close cooperation with existing international regulatory bodies, including UNTOC and the WOAH, should be pursued, in order to ensure consistency with relevant regulatory and implementation mechanisms.

3) Increased involvement of experts and civil society organisations

Global regulatory frameworks that address, among other things, the protection of animals and the environment, currently operate independently of public health policy. Although relevant mandates often overlap with respect to pathogen surveillance and emergence— such as within the International Health Regulations, the CBD and CITES – there is a lack of coherence and consideration of how they are interlinked. These problems could be addressed through greater involvement of experts and civil society organisations concerned with the protection of animal health and welfare, and the environment. They should be more involved in the deliberations and negotiations on health regulations and appropriate policies; this is necessary in order to supplement the expertise of those who work in the health sector. This also applies to deliberations and negotiations of the INB regarding the development of the International Pandemic Treaty.

Demands by FOUR PAWS

- ◆ Increased involvement of experts and civil society organisations concerned with the protection of animals, the environment and species.



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4) Establishment of a multi-sectoral and global coordination mechanism for risk assessment of zoonotic agents

To ensure that implementation of the International Pandemic Treaty is consistent with both the One Health approach defined by OHHLEP, and the goal of primary pandemic prevention, a cross-sectoral coordination mechanism, that involves disciplines and sectors at the interface between the environment, animals, and humans, should be established. In order to put this into practice, a committee should be established, within the framework of the Pandemic Treaty, with the aim of examining practices that harm human beings, animals, and the environment, and which accelerate the spread of pathogens. This committee should also help identify alternative low-risk systems that would improve the health and welfare of humans and animals.

To support the principle of equity, this body should also promote scientific and technical cooperation and monitoring and assessment as well as capacity building¹¹. For example, this could be used to evaluate the latest information and data on prevention and on the emergence of and the response to a pandemic, as well as scientific assessments of the potential health, environmental, and socioeconomic impacts of pandemic risks. This could provide a basis for developing new proposals for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

The committee could also promote the development, implementation, and evaluation of international, national, and regional strategies, plans and programs, as well as policies, legislation, and other measures consistent with the “Berlin Principles”¹². Until such a committee has been established, OHHLEP could bridge the gap between evidence-based information from science and the policy-oriented needs of governments and decision-making bodies, thereby contributing to the implementation of the International Pandemic Treaty.

It is a matter of international interest that all governments, in particular those with limited resources, have the right information, in order to be in a position to take appropriate measures to prevent outbreaks of zoonoses at the source. Dedicating financial support to the stage of pre-outbreak prevention will be the most effective way of enabling equity in global health policy.

For example, scientists consider curbing deforestation and combating the trafficking of wildlife to be the most cost-effective ways to prevent pandemics⁴. Measures to curb deforestation include the elimination of harmful subsidies, support for the territorial rights of indigenous peoples, and the introduction of direct payments to protect forests, thereby making deforestation unprofitable⁹.

Demands by FOUR PAWS

- ◆ Establishment of an evidence-based, cross-sectoral coordination mechanism that engages the various policy disciplines and sectors at the interface between the environment, animals, and humans.

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Animal Welfare.
Worldwide.



About FOUR PAWS

FOUR PAWS is the global animal welfare organisation for animals under direct human influence, which reveals suffering, rescues animals in need and protects them. Founded in 1988 in Vienna by Heli Dungler and friends, the organisation advocates for a world where humans treat animals with respect, empathy and understanding. The sustainable campaigns and projects of FOUR PAWS focus on companion animals including stray dogs and cats, farm animals and wild animals – such as bears, big cats and orangutans – kept in inappropriate conditions as well as in disaster and conflict zones. With offices in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Kosovo, the Netherlands, Switzerland, South Africa, Thailand, Ukraine, the UK, the USA and Vietnam as well as sanctuaries for rescued animals in eleven countries, FOUR PAWS provides rapid help and long-term solutions.



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