



WHO in 60 years: a chronology of public health milestones

In 2008, WHO is celebrating its 60th anniversary. The chronology below tells the story of WHO and public health achievements over the last 60 years.

- 1945: The United Nations Conference in San Francisco unanimously approves the establishment of a new, autonomous international health organization.
- 1946: The International Health Conference in New York approves the Constitution of the World Health Organization in July.
- 1947: Establishment of the epidemiological information service - an automatic telex reply service that tracks information on diseases subject to the International Sanitary Regulations (later renamed International Health Regulations) and other communicable diseases of international importance.
- 1948: The World Health Organization Constitution comes into force on 7 April.
- 1948: Publication of the International Classification of Disease - the global standard to report and categorize diseases, health-related conditions and external causes of disease and injury.
- 1948: Dr. Brock Chisholm from Canada is elected as the first Director-General of the World Health Organization.
- 1950: The World Health Assembly establishes World Health Day to take place annually on 7 April.
- 1950: Mass TB immunization with BCG vaccine under way to protect children from tuberculosis.
- 1952: Launch of the global yaws control programme in partnership with UNICEF. The programme succeeded in treating 300 million people in 50 countries, reducing global levels of the disease by more than 95%.
- 1953: Dr Marcolino Gomes Candau of Brazil is elected as the second Director-General of the World Health Organization.

- 1955: Launch of the Malaria Eradication Programme. Its objective was modified in 1969. Subsequently, most of the eradication programmes were turned into control programmes.
- 1958: The World Health Assembly initiates the smallpox eradication programme.
- 1963: Licensing of the oral polio vaccine. This vaccine was proven to stop person-to-person transmission of wild poliovirus.
- 1965: Issuance of the first report on diabetes mellitus. By 2000, 171 million people worldwide carried the disease, a number likely to increase to at least 366 million by 2030.
- 1966: Inauguration of the World Health Organization's headquarters.
- 1969: The International Sanitary Regulations, endorsed in 1951, are renamed the International Health Regulations, specifically covering cholera, plague, smallpox and yellow fever.
- 1972: To ensure the oral polio vaccine's universal use, its inventor Dr Albert Sabin, donates the rights to the vaccine to the World Health Organization.
- 1973: Dr Halfdan T. Mahler of Denmark is elected as the third Director-General of the World Health Organization.
- 1974: Launch of the expanded programme on immunization. Today, immunizations save more than 2.5 million lives of children per year.
- 1974: Launch of the Onchocerciasis Control Programme in collaboration with the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization.
- 1975: Establishment of the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases to help coordinate, support and influence global efforts to combat neglected infectious diseases that disproportionately affect poor and marginalized populations.
- 1976: The Ebola virus is first identified in the Western Equatorial province of Sudan and in Zaire (now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo).
- 1977: Publication of the first essential medicines list. Today, the list contains 340 medicines that address most global priority conditions, including malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, reproductive health and, increasingly, chronic diseases such as cancer and diabetes.
- 1978: The International Conference on Primary Health Care in Alma-Ata sets the historic goal of "Health for all".

- 1979: A global commission certifies the worldwide eradication of smallpox.
- 1986: Creation of the Global Programme on AIDS to develop and coordinate a global strategy to fight the disease.
- 1988: Dr Hiroshi Nakajima of Japan is elected as the fourth Director-General of the World Health Organization.
- 1988: The World Health Assembly endorses a resolution on non-discrimination against people living with AIDS.
- 1988: Establishment of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative in collaboration with Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and UNICEF.
- 1991: The World Health Assembly adopts a resolution to eliminate leprosy.
- 1995: Establishment of the International Commission for the Certification of Dracunculiasis Eradication. (Dracunculiasis is also known as guinea-worm disease.)
- 1995: Launch of the DOTS strategy for TB control, under which 30 million people have been treated to date through primary services.
- 1996: Creation of UNAIDS with six founding partner agencies.
- 1998: Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland of Norway is elected as the fifth Director-General of the World Health Organization.
- 2000: Launch of the Stop TB Partnership, hosted by WHO. It now includes over 500 partners working to reduce the global burden of TB by increasing access to treatment through DOTS programmes, and addressing challenges such as TB/HIV and drug-resistant TB.
- 2000: Establishment of the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network to detect and combat the international spread of outbreaks.
- 2000: Establishment of the Commission on Macroeconomics and Health to assess the impact of health on development.
- 2000: 189 Member States of the United Nations unanimously adopt a Millennium Declaration which results in the Millennium Development Goals. Three out of the eight goals relate directly to health.
- 2001: Launch of the Measles Initiative in partnership with the American Red Cross, UNICEF and the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. As of October 2007, overall global measles deaths have fallen by 68%.

- 2003: Dr LEE Jong-wook of the Republic of Korea is elected as the sixth Director-General of the World Health Organization.
- 2003: Launch of the 3x5 Initiative with UNAIDS, aiming to get three million people on antiretroviral treatment by the end of 2005.
- 2003: The World Health Assembly adopts the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control - now one of the most widely supported treaties in the history of the United Nations.
- 2003: Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is first recognized and then controlled. WHO coordinated the international investigation with the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network and worked closely with health authorities in the affected countries.
- 2003: Creation of the Commission on Intellectual Property Rights, Innovation and Public Health.
- 2004: Adoption of the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health.
- 2004: The World Health Organization and partners advocate for road safety as "no accident".
- 2004: The Strategic Health Operations Centre is used for the first time to assist with emergency coordination following the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster.
- 2005: The World Health Assembly revises and adopts the International Health Regulations, a new legal framework adopted by most countries to contain the threats from diseases that may rapidly spread from one country to another.
- 2005: Launch of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health to support countries and global health partners in addressing social factors leading to ill-health and inequities.
- 2005: Launch of the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health to ensure that all women, infants and children remain healthy.
- 2006: Dr Margaret Chan of the People's Republic of China is elected as the seventh Director-General of the World Health Organization.
- 2007: New International Health Regulations (2005) enter into force.
- 2008: The World Health Organization advocates to protect health from climate change, a growing threat to public health security.