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Strategy Against the Threat of Influenza

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The World Health Organization (WHO) has launched a **Global Influenza Strategy for 2019-2030**, which aims to prevent seasonal influenza, control the virus's spread from animals to humans and prepare for the next pandemic

The WHO warned that new pandemics are “**inevitable**”.

Pandemic

- A pandemic is the **worldwide spread of a new disease**.
- An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges and spreads around the world, and most people do not have immunity. Viruses that have caused past pandemics **typically originated from animal influenza viruses**.
- Influenza epidemics are **largely seasonal** and affect around one billion people and kill hundreds of thousands annually making it one of the **world's greatest public health challenges**. E.g.:
 - **H5N1 (called avian influenza or "bird flu")** is a type of influenza virus that causes a highly infectious, severe respiratory disease in birds.
- The new strategy is the most comprehensive and far-reaching that WHO has ever developed for influenza.
- The strategy meets one of WHO's mandates to improve **core capacities for public health, and increase global preparedness**.

- It outlines a path to protect populations every year and helps prepare for a pandemic through strengthening routine programmes. **Features of the new strategy are:**
 - Every country should strengthen routine health programmes and develop tailor-made influenza programmes that strengthen disease surveillance, response, prevention, control, and preparedness.
 - WHO recommends annual flu vaccines as the most effective way to prevent the spread of the disease, especially for healthcare workers and people at higher risk of influenza complications.
 - Development of more effective and more accessible vaccines and antiviral treatments.
 - Due to its mutating strains, vaccine formulas must be regularly updated.
- The new influenza strategy builds on and benefits from successful WHO programmes like:
 - **Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System (GISRS):** Launched in 1952, GISRS comprised of WHO Collaborating Centres and national influenza centres. It focuses on monitoring seasonal trends and potentially pandemic viruses. This system serves as the backbone of the global alert system for influenza.
 - **Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Framework** is a unique access and benefit sharing system that supports the sharing of potentially pandemic viruses, provides access to life saving vaccines and treatments in the event of a pandemic and supports the building of pandemic preparedness capacities in countries through partnership contributions from industry.

World Health Organisation

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) is a **specialized agency of the United Nations** that is concerned with international public health.
- It is **headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland** and the WHO's constitution came into force on April 7, 1948—a date now celebrated every year as World Health Day.
- The **World Health Assembly** is the **supreme decision-making body in WHO**. The assembly meets annually and is attended by delegations from 194 member states.