WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Despite major advances in public health, medicine, and technology, the United States and the world remain vulnerable to biological threats — whether they occur naturally or are the result of an accidental or intentional release. In the United States, a severe pandemic could result in twice as many deaths as all U.S. battlefield fatalities since 1776.¹

The risk of a catastrophic biological event has only increased and will continue to be magnified by global travel and trade, urbanization, weather changes, terrorist interest in weapons of mass destruction, and rapid advances in technology. In the last several years, there have been at least three outbreaks of Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), along with outbreaks of cholera in Cameroon, measles in Pakistan, the plague in Mozambique, and yellow fever in Angola and Brazil. These threats have the potential to kill millions, cost billions, and exacerbate political instability.

Global health security starts at home — the United States must sustain and build on its current political and financial contributions to programs for both global health and global health security, while continuing to develop and maintain the tools required to prevent, detect, and respond to biological threats. A weak health system anywhere in the world poses a risk to the United States if that system is overwhelmed by a disease outbreak. Whether through traditional global health investments or those specifically targeting global health security, the establishment of strong, well-staffed health systems is essential for preventing local outbreaks and keeping them from becoming global pandemics. These priorities were affirmed in the release of several strategic policies, including the National Biodefense Strategy Act, the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act, and the congressionally requested Global Health Security Strategy.

Individual country governments cannot succeed in fighting biological threats on their own. It requires a collaborative, cohesive, and comprehensive effort across multiple sectors — made by donor and recipient governments, the private sector, multilateral organizations, academia, and civil society — all working toward measurable targets and the goals mutually agreed upon in the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA).

GHSA was launched in 2014 to help countries build their capacities to detect and respond to infectious disease outbreaks. With crucial bipartisan leadership from the United States and key international partners, GHSA has grown into an alliance of more than 60 nations, as well as international organizations and nongovernmental organization (NGO) stakeholders. Due to this success, the United States recently recommitted to GHSA with political and financial leadership through 2024.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONGRESS

Support increases to global health security programming at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that will strengthen vulnerable health systems abroad. Strong health systems backed by sufficient resources and locally trained personnel are vital for outbreak prevention, detection, and response. This support should include resources for the infrastructure projects, workforce development, and technical assistance needed to effectively reduce risk and fill dangerous gaps in global health security.

Continue to support U.S. engagement in GHSA through the Department of State (DoS) to ensure that meaningful action, political will, and financing strategies are there to fill existing gaps in health security and to advance national and international action plans. This should include robust funding for U.S. domestic and international roles in GHSA, including full support for all departments and agencies that advance global health security, including USAID, CDC, and DoS, along with the Departments of Defense, Justice, Agriculture, and Health and Human Services.

Ensure that research and development (R&D) for new vaccines, drugs, diagnostics, and other health tools are prioritized in all global health security, pandemic, and emergency response strategies. Emerging infectious disease is a perpetual challenge; the tools needed to respond to the next epidemic require sustainable, forward-thinking investments in global health R&D.

Encourage cooperation and coordination among the various actors with a role to play in global health security. This includes partner countries, the public and private sectors, civil society, and academia. Since human health is inextricably linked with the health of the environment and other animals, it is also important to encourage coordination and cooperation with physicians, veterinarians, and other scientific and environmental professionals. This is an opportunity to advance shared goals around public health, international development, national security, and diplomacy.
GLOBAL HEALTH SECURITY

WHY THIS INVESTMENT IS IMPORTANT

Infectious disease outbreaks and other emerging global health threats are occurring with increasing frequency and severity. Factors such as globalization, urbanization, climate change, and the ease of travel and trade mean that dangerous pathogens are more easily transported and spread around the world, with no regard for national boundaries. As seen with recent outbreaks of Ebola and Zika, infectious diseases that were traditionally thought to impact only non-U.S. regions now have direct consequences for the health of Americans.

Strong health systems in high-, middle-, and low-income countries are all vital for detecting, preventing, and responding to natural and man-made biological threats that jeopardize global and American health. In turn, because global health threats affect economies worldwide, strong health systems also support economic growth, helping to ensure that vital progress in economic development made with U.S. foreign aid is not reversed.

GHSA is a first step in mobilizing the international community behind a common set of global health security principles; it provides countries with a roadmap for strengthening their capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to health threats. GHSA Action Packages, designed to translate political support into concrete steps toward health security. Action Packages are led and implemented by countries focused on antimicrobial resistance; zoonotic diseases; biosafety and biosecurity; immunizations; national laboratory systems; real-time surveillance; reporting; health workforce development; emergency operations centers; links between rapid responses by legal, multinational, and public health organizations; as well as medical countermeasures and personnel deployment. More than 80 countries have voluntarily conducted a Joint External Evaluation (JEE) to assess their capacity for health security, to identify and prioritize their greatest areas of need, and to engage with potential partners for support. GHSA demonstrates an international commitment to global health security and a mechanism through which related U.S. investments can leverage further investments and action from partner countries.

Public investments in global health security and in GHSA also leverage support and action from the private sector. Private sector companies have made valuable efforts to support stronger health security in countries around the world; these businesses also offer unique efficiencies and capabilities for mobilizing resources, scaling efforts, and innovating solutions.

Future outbreaks and new strains of disease will always be on the horizon, while other threats such as drug and antibiotic resistance are currently on the rise. In addition, weak health systems can open the door for unintentional or intentional misuse of dangerous pathogens and biological materials. Terrorists continue to be interested in pursuing weapons of mass destruction, while rapid advances in technology enable the creation and manipulation of pathogens with pandemic potential.

Strong health systems with robust detection, response, and prevention capabilities — including sustained research and development for new drugs, vaccines, and diagnostics — are not only critical to preventing and mitigating health crises, but to fulfilling routine health care functions that promote healthy, prosperous societies.

RESOURCES
International Health Regulations https://bit.ly/2SBN56Y

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CITATIONS