



In The Light of Recent Developments, Discuss The Need For a Global Pandemic Treaty. (250 Words / 15 M) (GS-2 Health & Global Groupings)

Approach:

1. Introduction
2. First mention the shortcomings of the existing framework.
3. Then elaborately discuss the Global Pandemic Treaty.
4. Conclusion

At present Global public health responses are guided by the **International Health Regulations** (IHR). The Regulations were adopted in 1969 and revised in 2005 after the SARS outbreak. The regulations provide an overarching legal framework that defines countries' rights and obligations in handling public health events and emergencies that have the potential to cross borders. IHR is based on 4 pillars: **Detect, Assess, Report and Respond**. The Regulations also outline the criteria to determine whether or not a particular event constitutes a 'Public Health Emergency of International Concern' (PHEIC).

Shortcomings of the existing framework:

- The current IHR system has little power to ensure governments comply with their responsibilities. The Governments do not accurately report on their core capacities to prepare for and respond to health emergencies.
- International Health Regulation (IHR) obligations are heavily tailored towards prevention and detection of pathogens, and very limited on response stages to prevent transmission.
- The IHR is governed by the Ministries of Health of the member States. The Health Ministries often have little influence on the underlying problem of a lack of broader political will, including to commit resources that could improve core capacities in accordance with the principles of IHR.
- The IHR primarily addresses capacities at a national level, which does not improve global oversight and coordination.
- Despite attempts by WHO to devise improved methods of monitoring state compliance with IHR, there have been modest changes. These efforts under IHR do not appear to have had much effect on state preparedness or response.

COVID-19 Pandemic has led to recognition of the fact that IHR need further revision and that is the reason for the negotiation of new treaty.

Global Pandemic Treaty:

In December 2021, the World Health Assembly held a special session and took the decision to form a **global pandemic treaty** to 'strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness and response'. An **Intergovernmental Negotiating Body** (INB) will be responsible for drafting and



negotiating a treaty under **Article 19** of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Constitution. This will be second such initiative under Article 19. The first was the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control which came into effect in 2005.

The new pandemic treaty is expected to cover aspects like *data sharing, genome sequencing of emerging viruses, equitable distribution of vaccines and drugs and related research* throughout the world. A treaty could also enhance the capacity of more countries (especially in low- and middle-income countries) to produce diagnostics, therapies, and vaccines, built by a global commitment of funds, expertise, and technology transfer. It will help to reach consensus on high-level legally binding principles and commitments within the Convention.

Under the treaty, **Prevention of pandemics and their early detection** should be the topmost priority. This could be achieved with a more robust country-reporting mechanism, as well as through the more widespread use of joint external evaluations and better follow-up. Ensuring **universal and equitable access** (addressing vaccine inequities) to medical solutions, such as vaccines, medicines and diagnostics will ensure resilience to the future pandemics. Better **alert systems** should be developed. Digital technologies and innovative tools for data collection and sharing as well as predictive analytics can support **real-time communication** and early warnings. The **WHO alarm mechanism** must be **reformed** by making the process of declaration of Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) and enforcing travel restrictions more robust. A **new pooled insurance mechanism** could be established to share the risks associated with infectious disease outbreaks.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought forward the gaps in the existing mechanisms to tackle global pandemics. The fact that the comity of nations under the aegis of WHO have agreed to negotiate a Global Pandemic Treaty indicates that have realized the existing system needs to be fixed. Inability to address these gaps will leave the world vulnerable to a similar or even more deadly pandemic in future.