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US withdrawal from WHO 'risks global safety', agency says in detailed rebuttal



WHO/P. Viot | The flag of the UN World Health Organization (WHO) flies at its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

24 January 2026 | **Health**



The World Health Organization (WHO) has issued a detailed [statement](#) regretting the United States decision to leave the UN agency, and declaring that it will leave both the US and the world less safe as a result.

The statement, released on Saturday, also includes a rebuttal of the US administration's reasoning for the measures. In response to government statements that the [WHO](#) has "trashed and tarnished" and insulted it, and compromised its independence, the agency notes that "the reverse true," and that **the WHO has always sought to "engage with the United States in good faith, with full respect for its sovereignty."**

The accusation by the US administration that the WHO has "pursued a politicized, bureaucratic agenda driven by nations hostile to American interests" is countered and described as untrue. The agency, the statement reads "has always been and remains impartial and exists to serve all countries, with respect for their sovereignty, and without fear or favour."

Defence of COVID-19 response

A significant portion of the statement is dedicated to defending the WHO against US accusations of "failures" during the [COVID-19](#) pandemic: according to the administration, the WHO obstructed the "timely and accurate sharing of critical information" and "concealed those failures".

The agency counters this by noting that, throughout the pandemic, it acted quickly, shared all information it had rapidly and transparently with the world, and advised Member States on the basis of the best available evidence.

WHO recommended the use of masks, vaccines and physical distancing, but at no stage recommended mask mandates, vaccine mandates or lockdowns.

Immediately after receiving the first reports of a cluster of cases of "pneumonia of unknown cause" in Wuhan, China on 31 December 2019, WHO asked China for more information and activated its emergency incident management system.

By the time the first death was reported from China on 11 January 2020, WHO had already alerted the world through formal channels, public statements and social media, convened global experts, and published comprehensive guidance for countries on how to protect their populations and health systems.

When the WHO Director-General declared COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern under the International Health

Regulations on 30 January 2020 – the highest level of alarm under international health law – outside of China there were fewer than 100 reported cases, and no reported deaths.

In the first weeks and months of the pandemic, the Director-General urged all countries repeatedly to take immediate action to protect their populations, warning that “the window of opportunity is closing”, “this is not a drill” and describing COVID-19 as “public enemy number one”.

In response to the multiple reviews of the COVID-19 pandemic, including of WHO’s performance, WHO has taken steps to strengthen its own work, and to support countries to bolster their own pandemic preparedness and response capacities. The systems WHO developed and managed before, during and after the emergency phase of the pandemic, have contributed to keeping all countries safe, including the United States.

Door open for US return

Despite the withdrawal notice, WHO remains committed to global cooperation and expresses hope that the United States will re-engage in the future. The agency highlights recent milestones, including the adoption of the WHO Pandemic Agreement, described as “a landmark instrument of international law” aimed at preventing and responding to future pandemics.

As a founding member of the WHO, the United States of America has contributed significantly to many of the agency’s greatest achievements, including the eradication of smallpox, and progress against many other public health threats including polio, HIV, [Ebola](#) , influenza, tuberculosis, malaria, neglected tropical diseases, antimicrobial resistance, food safety and more.

“WHO remains steadfastly committed to working with all countries in pursuit of its core mission,” the statement concludes, reaffirming its mandate to advance “the highest attainable standard of health as a fundamental right for all people.”

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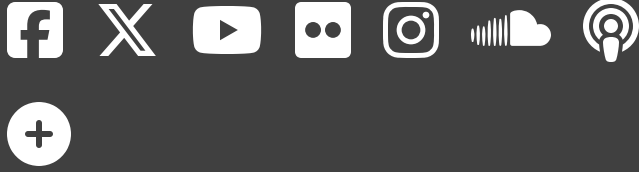


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