

[News](#) [Sport](#) [Business](#) [Opinion](#) [Ukraine](#) [Money](#) [Royals](#) [Life](#) [Style](#) [Travel](#) [Cult](#)[See all News](#)

## WHO could gain powers to impose lockdown on UK

MPs fear new treaty designed to increase the organisation's powers would enable it to enforce border closures and vaccine passports

By Tony Diver, WHITEHALL CORRESPONDENT

25 May 2023 • 8:10pm



Lockdown measures could be imposed on the UK by the World Health Organisation (WHO) during a future pandemic under sweeping new powers, ministers fear.

Member states would be obliged to follow the agency's instructions when responding to pandemics, including by introducing [vaccine passports](#), border closures and quarantine measures, under a draft update to its regulations.

A new "pandemic treaty" under discussion would also force Britain to spend five per cent of its health budget on [preparing for another virus outbreak](#).

Ministers are understood to be alarmed by plans to increase the WHO's powers enabling its governing body to require countries to hand over the recipe of vaccines, regardless of intellectual property rights, and to counter misinformation.

Conservative MPs have written to ministers to warn of an "ambition evident...for the WHO to transition from an advisory organisation to a controlling international authority".

### Foreign Office urged to block powers

In their letter, seen by The Telegraph, they urge the Foreign Office to block powers that "appear to intrude materially into the UK's ability to make its own rules and control its own budgets".

Responding to the concerns on Thursday, Andrew Mitchell, a Foreign Office minister, told The Telegraph that he would block any law that prevents the UK from setting its own

health policy.

“The UK is supportive of the pandemic treaty currently being negotiated by national governments, which could speed up the sharing of data on new pandemic threats so we are able to respond quickly in the [event of future pandemics](#),” he said.

“We’re clear that we would never agree to anything that crosses our points of principle on sovereignty or prevents the UK from taking decisive action against future pandemics.”

### **Changes to make WHO advice 'binding'**

The rule changes have been proposed as part of plans to update the WHO’s International Health Regulations (IHRs) in light of [the coronavirus pandemic](#) and establish a new Pandemic Preparedness Treaty.

The treaty was [first proposed by world leaders](#) including Boris Johnson in 2021 during the pandemic and was originally designed to improve alert systems, data-sharing and the production of vaccines to “foster an all of government and all of society approach”.

But among 300 proposed amendments to the IHRs are changes to make the WHO’s advice “binding” and introduce a new requirement for countries to recognise it as the global authority on public health measures.

The plan would require member countries to “recognise WHO as the guidance and coordinating authority of international public health response...and undertake to follow WHO’s recommendations in their international public health response”.

If passed, the change would mean the WHO could enforce border closures, quarantine measures and vaccine passports on all member countries, including the UK.

A draft of the treaty itself would commit member states to spending five per cent of their health budgets, plus a proportion of GDP, to pandemic preparedness.

### **'Particularly worrying'**

Six conservative MPs led by Esther McVey, the former Cabinet minister, have written to Mr Mitchell to call for a Commons vote on the draft treaty and regulations before they are signed.

Ms McVey said: “There is, rightly, growing concern about the WHO’s Pandemic Treaty and International Health Regulations.

“The plans represent a significant shift for the organisation, from a member-led advisory body to a health authority with powers of compulsion.

“This is particularly worrying when you consider the WHO’s poor track record on providing consistent, clear and scientifically sound advice for managing [international disease outbreaks](#).”

The letter has also been signed by the Tory MPs Sir John Redwood, David Davis, Philip Davies, Sir Christopher Chope and Danny Kruger.

Mr Kruger said: “Coordination and cooperation in a public health emergency is sensible but ceding control over health budgets and critical decision-making in a pandemic to an unelected international organisation seems profoundly at odds with national autonomy and democratic accountability.”

Campaigners also expressed concern about increasing the WHO’s role in identifying misinformation, after its experts dismissed [the “lab leak” Covid origin theory](#) only to later accept it “remain(s) on the table”.

Molly Kingsley, co-founder of the UsForThem campaign group, said: “We should all be concerned about the WHO being ordained as an arbiter of pandemic truth, especially given its poor record during the pandemic, such as its claim that Covid was definitively zoonotic in origin and its April 2020 denial of the role of natural immunity in protecting against infection.”

---

## Politics Headlines

Your personal political briefing, delivered to your inbox every day



Sign up

---

### Related Topics

World Health Organisation, Pandemics and epidemics, Coronavirus



---

The Telegraph values your comments but kindly requests all posts are on topic, constructive and respectful. Please review our [commenting policy](#).

Show comments

## More stories