



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

*From Will Quince MP  
Minister of State for Health and Secondary Care*

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Richard Fuller MP

By email to: [richard.fuller.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:richard.fuller.mp@parliament.uk)

11 May 2023

Dear Richard,

Thank you for your correspondence of 31 March on behalf of a number of your constituents about the World Health Organization (WHO) and pandemic preparedness. Please accept my sincere apologies for the delay in replying.

I am grateful to you for raising your constituents' concerns.

COVID-19 has demonstrated that no one is safe until we are all safe, and that a truly global solution is needed to better protect the whole world from the detrimental effects of pandemics and other health threats. The UK therefore supports a new legally binding instrument as part of a comprehensive approach to pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

The instrument will be designed to improve global performance in preventing, preparing for and responding to future disease outbreaks of pandemic potential, at a regional, national and global level. As the leading global health agency, the WHO is the clear institutional home for a legally binding agreement. The UK is a participant in a number of multilateral treaties, including many through the United Nations and its specialised agencies, including the WHO.

The negotiating process for the pandemic instrument is being led by WHO member states, including the UK. Although we understand the concerns that have been raised about the WHO's ability to force member states to implement domestic decisions, Parliament's role in the UK remains undiminished and the instrument would not become binding until ratified by the Government.

The Government has a strong commitment and duty to implement international law that it is subject to. However, we have been clear that the UK will not sign up to any instrument that would compromise the UK's ability to take domestic decisions on restrictions or other national measures concerning public health. This includes lockdowns, domestic immunisation rollout, vaccine passports and other public health measures. Decisions such as these will remain the competency of individual WHO member states, and a pandemic instrument will not hand over the governance of health in the UK to the WHO.

The International Health Regulations (IHR) amendment negotiations will continue among all 194 member states of the WHO, including the UK, and we are working alongside our international partners towards an agreed set of amendments ahead of the 77th World

Health Assembly in 2024. Any IHR amendment that is adopted will require agreement by two-thirds of all WHO member states. Throughout the negotiation process, the WHO will publish information on its website at [apps.who.int/gb/wgih/](https://apps.who.int/gb/wgih/).

We understand the concerns that have been raised about UK sovereignty; I would like to provide assurance that many of the proposed IHR amendments are centred around respecting states' sovereignty. Should the current or a future UK Government wish to accept an IHR amendment, then changes to domestic law to reflect obligations under that amendment may be required. Any such changes would naturally be subject to parliamentary scrutiny. In all circumstances, the sovereignty of the UK Parliament would remain unchanged, and the UK would remain in control of any future domestic decisions about national restrictions or other measures. Only UK legislation can change UK law.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Will Quince', is centered below the text 'Yours sincerely,'.

**WILL QUINCE MP  
MINISTER OF STATE**