

Trump Withdraws U.S. from World Health Organization

Public health experts say U.S. withdrawal from the W.H.O. would undermine the nation's standing as a global health leader and make it harder to fight the next pandemic.



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Reporting from Washington

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President Trump moved quickly on Monday to withdraw the United States from the World Health Organization, a move that public health experts say will undermine the nation's standing as a global health leader and make it harder to fight the next pandemic.

In an executive order issued about eight hours after he took the oath of office, Mr. Trump cited a string of reasons for the withdrawal, including the W.H.O.'s "mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic," and the "failure to adopt urgently needed reforms." He said the agency demands "unfairly onerous payments" from the United States, and complained that China pays less.

The move was not unexpected. Mr. Trump has been railing against the W.H.O. since 2020, when he attacked the agency over its approach to the coronavirus pandemic and threatened to withhold United States funding from it. In July 2020, Mr. Trump took formal steps to withdraw from the agency.

But after he lost the 2020 election, the threat did not materialize. On his first day in office, Jan. 20, 2021, former President Joseph R. Biden Jr. blocked it from going into effect.

Leaving the W.H.O. would mean, among other things, that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention would have no access to the global data that the agency provides. When China characterized the genetic sequence of the novel coronavirus in 2020, it released the information to W.H.O., which shared it with other nations.

More recently, the W.H.O. has become a target of conservatives over its work on a “pandemic treaty” to strengthen pandemic preparedness and set legally binding policies for member countries on surveillance of pathogens, rapid sharing of outbreak data, and building up local manufacturing and supply chains for vaccines and treatments, among others.

Talks on the treaty broke down last year. In the United States, some Republican lawmakers viewed the agreement as a threat to American sovereignty.

Lawrence O. Gostin, a public health law expert at Georgetown University who helped negotiate the treaty, said that a United States withdrawal from W.H.O. would be “a grievous wound” to public health but an “even deeper wound to American national interests and national security.”

Founded in 1948 with help from the United States, the World Health Organization is an agency of the United Nations. Its mission, according to its website, is to “confront the biggest health challenges of our time and measurably advance the well-being of the world’s people.”

That includes bringing aid to war-torn areas like Gaza and tracking emerging epidemics like Zika, Ebola and Covid-19. The biennial budget of W.H.O. is about \$6.8 billion; the United States has typically contributed an outsize share.

According to Mr. Gostin, it will take some time for the United States to withdraw. A joint resolution adopted by Congress at the agency’s founding addressed a potential withdrawal, and requires the United States to give a year’s notice and pay its financial obligations to the organization for the current fiscal year.

A correction was made on Jan. 21, 2025: An earlier version of this article incorrectly described the WHO’s \$6.8 billion budget. It is the organization’s biennial budget, not annual.

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