Strategic & Technical Advisory Group for Infectious Hazards (STAG-IH)

Terms of reference

Background
The Review Committee on the Role of the International Health Regulations (2005) in the Ebola Outbreak and Response recommended the establishment by WHO of “a standing advisory committee, which would have the primary purpose of regularly reviewing WHO’s risk assessment and risk communication; creates an intermediate level of alert via a new category of risk that requires specific follow-up, called an International Public Health Alert (IHPA); and develops an updated communication strategy” in its Report on the Role of the International Health Regulations (2005) in the Ebola Outbreak and Response (WHA69/21).

Purpose
Following the recommendation made by the aforementioned Review Committee, the Director-General decided to establish the Strategic and Technical Advisory Group on Infectious Hazards to provide independent advice and analysis to the Deputy Director General of Emergency Preparedness and Response (DDG of WHO/EPR), as per the functions delegated to him, on the infectious hazards that may pose a potential threat to global health security. The STAG will play a distinctive principal advisory role on infectious hazards, without prejudice to the respective mandates and work already carried out by the Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee (IOAC) for the WHO Health Emergencies Programme and the IHR emergency committees (EC).
Functions

The STAG shall have the following functions:

- Assessing the **global context of infectious diseases** on a regular basis for changing determinants of infectious hazards, and conducting and reviewing horizon scanning of new and emerging infectious hazards and technologies;

- Providing analysis and advice on priority setting for **WHO's strategies and activities** in prevention, preparedness and response related to infectious hazards;

- Reviewing information about **new and emerging infectious diseases** and ongoing outbreaks and making recommendations for further investigation, prevention and control, research and innovation;

- Providing analysis and advice on **innovative collaborations, partnerships** and other mechanisms for greater global health security;

- Providing technical and scientific advice on issues related to the Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility (PEF) and the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board (GPMB).

For PEF specifically, STAG-IH will:

i. Review and recommend adjustments to the PEF Cash Window activation criteria;

ii. Make a technical assessment of outbreak events for eligibility against the activation criteria;

iii. Within the technical competency of STAG-IH, assess any proposed country response plan that has not been developed with WHO, with the aim of ensuring consistency with WHO policy or prevailing expert opinion in the absence of WHO policy;

iv. On the basis of a technical assessment, provide advice to the PEF Steering Body in connection with a decision by the PEF Steering Body to activate the Cash Window for a given outbreak;

v. Respond to queries from the Steering Body that have been raised through the PEF Coordinator and that pertain to items (i) (iii) (iii) and (iv) above and that are within the scope of the STAG-IH’s mandate as set out in its TORs;
vi. Chair of the STAG-IH or a member designated by Chair will represent STAG-IH for PEF Steering Group Cash Window Activation discussion.

**Membership**

The STAG will have between 10 and 15 members, who shall serve in their personal capacity and who will be selected by WHO taking into consideration *inter alia* their technical expertise, geographical representation and gender balance. Each member will be cleared of any conflict of interest\(^1\).

Membership of STAG shall seek to reflect a representation of:

- Professional experience;
- Major areas of expertise;
- Strategic focus areas of WHO work in infectious hazards.

Staff members of the WHO or other United Nations entities are not eligible to serve as members of the STAG.

Members of the STAG shall be appointed to serve for a maximum period of 3 years, and will be eligible for reappointment, however, may not serve more than two consecutive terms.

Their appointment as members may be terminated at any time by WHO, if WHO’s interest so requires, in particular for:

- any change resulting in a conflict of interest or involvement in activities resulting in a conflict of interest incompatible with serving on STAG;
- a lack of professionalism involving, for example, a breach of confidentiality or other serious failure to comply with commitments expected under these Terms of Reference.

**Roles and responsibilities of STAG members**

Members of STAG have a responsibility to provide WHO with high quality, well considered advice and recommendations on matters described in these Terms of Reference. Members

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\(^1\) Prior to being considered for STAG membership, nominees shall be required to complete a WHO Declaration of Interests form as per the WHO standard practice.
play a critical role in ensuring the reputation of STAG. Members shall be committed to the development and improvement of public health policies.

STAG members shall not purport to speak on behalf of, or represent, the STAG or WHO to any third party, unless authorized to do so by WHO.

STAG members will not be remunerated for their participation in STAG; however, reasonable expenses such as travel expenses incurred by attendance at STAG or related meetings will be compensated by WHO, as per applicable WHO rules.

STAG members are expected to commit to invest a substantial amount of their time to STAG. In this context, STAG members may also be requested by WHO to participate as observers in other important WHO or partner’s meetings.

Chair and Vice-chair

WHO shall designate a Chair from among the members of the group. His/her designation may be terminated at any time by WHO, if WHO’s interest so requires.

The Chair’s roles shall include the following:
- to chair the meeting of the STAG;
- to liaise with WHO and Members between meetings.

The Vice-chair may also be designated by WHO, as deemed necessary.

Other participants

Representatives of WHO expert committees and technical advisory groups, convened by headquarters or WHO regional offices, may be invited by WHO to participate in STAG meetings.

WHO may invite additional experts, as ad hoc advisers to provide advice, including through drafting working papers and otherwise contributing to STAG discussions.

Representatives from inter-governmental organizations, as well as non-State actors may also be invited by WHO to participate in STAG meetings or in specific STAG discussions as observers and present the views and policies of their organizations.

The aforementioned categories of participants may, share information or otherwise contribute to the STAG discussions, as necessary, and only upon invitation of the Chair. They
will not participate in the process of adopting the final decisions or recommendations of the STAG.

**Status and Conflict of Interest Management**

In the exercise of their functions, the members and ad hoc advisers shall act as international experts serving WHO exclusively; they act in a personal and individual capacity and may not request or receive instructions from any government or authority external to WHO. Furthermore, the members and ad hoc advisers must be free of any real, potential or apparent conflict of interest.

To this end, proposed members and ad hoc advisers will be required to complete the WHO declaration of interest form (DoI) in order to allow WHO to determine whether their participation would give rise to a real, potential or apparent conflict of interest.

A register of members’ interests and signed confidentiality undertakings shall be maintained by WHO.

In addition, in order to enhance WHO’s management of conflicts of interest as well as strengthen public trust and transparency in connection with WHO meetings involving the provision of technical/normative advice, the names and brief biographies of members (“Published Information”) being considered for participation in STAG meetings are disclosed for public notice and comment.

The comments received by WHO through this process are an integral component of WHO’s conflict of interest assessment policy and are carefully reviewed.

The list of participating members, a summary of relevant interests disclosed by them, and any appropriate mitigation measures taken by WHO relating to the management of conflicts of interests, will be reported publicly in accordance with WHO practice.

**Secretariat support**

WHO/WHE will provide secretariat support to the STAG.

**Meetings and operational procedures**

WHO shall normally convene a STAG meeting in person at least once a year. Additional regular or ad hoc meetings may be convened by WHO also through teleconferences, videoconferences or electronic communications, as deemed necessary. Members are expected to participate in most STAG meetings.
The agenda of STAG meetings is prepared by WHO – in consultation with the Chair – and shall include any subject within the Terms of Reference of the STAG, as appropriate.

Working Groups are established for the purpose of addressing specific questions or public health issues that cannot be covered by existing standing WHO Advisory Committees. The need and charge for a Working Group is discussed and agreed during STAG-IH meetings and Chair of STAG-IH will provide recommendations to DDG of WHO/EPR. Each Working Group operates under specific terms of reference (TORs). In order to maintain coherence and cross-fertilization between STAG-IH and Working Groups, each Working Group should include at least one STAG-IH member. Working Group shall submit its reports to DDG of WHO/EPR and inform STAG-IH.

The working language of the STAG meetings is English.

**Reporting and recommendations**

The STAG shall submit its reports to the DDG of WHO/EPR. In addition, the STAG Chair will debrief the DDG of WHO/EPR (or designee) following each STAG meeting.

If members of the STAG cannot agree on the recommendation to be made to WHO, each shall be entitled to have his/her divergent opinion reflected in or appended to the report.

All recommendations from the STAG are advisory to WHO, which retains full control over any subsequent decisions or actions regarding any proposals, policy issues or other matters considered by the STAG. WHO also retains full control over the publication of the reports of the STAG, on the website, in the Weekly Epidemiological Record and/or in peer-reviewed journals.

**Information and documentation**

The information and documentation to which STAG members, ad hoc advisers and observers may gain access in performing STAG related activities will be considered as confidential and proprietary to WHO and/or parties collaborating with WHO. To protect the proprietary and confidential nature of such information, all members, ad hoc advisers and observers will therefore be required to sign an appropriate confidentiality undertaking and members and ad hoc advisers shall further be required to agree to provisions on ownership, as per WHO practice.