

WHO, World Health Organisation (www.who.int)
(other source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Health_Organisation)

PURPOSE

- acting as a **coordinating authority on international public health**; specialized UN agency for health

STRUCTURE

- governed by 192 Member States through the World Health Assembly – their main tasks: to approve the programme, budget for the following two-year period and to decide major policy questions
- current Director General: Lee Jong-wook

HISTORY

- established on 7 April 1948, headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland
- WHO's predecessor: the Health Organisation, an agency of the League of Nations; WHO inherited much of the mandate and resources

GOALS

- **MISSION** (set out in WHO's Constitution): **the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health**; HEALTH definition: a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity
- **MAJOR TASK**: to combat disease, especially key infectious diseases AND coordinate international efforts to monitor outbreaks of infectious diseases – SARS, malaria, AIDS, bird flu...
- **PROGRAMMES**: developing and distributing vaccines
also compiles the widely followed **International Classification of Diseases (ICD)**
- **CAMPAIGNS**: to boost consumption of vegetables worldwide, discourage tobacco consumption etc.
- **RESEARCHES**: ex.: whether or not the electromagnetic field surrounding cell phones has a negative influence on health

COMMENT: Some of this work can be controversial, such as the April 2003 WHO report which recommended that sugar be no more than 10% of a healthy diet, which led to lobbying by the sugar industry against this recommendation

- In addition to WHO's stated mission, international treaties assign the Organization a variety of responsibilities. For instance, the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs and the Convention of Psychoactive Substances call on WHO to issue binding scientific and medical assessments of psychoactive drugs and recommend how they should be regulated. In this way, WHO acts as a check on the power of the drug policymaking Commission on Narcotic Drugs

SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMMES

- nearing success in developing vaccines against **MALARIA** and **SCHISTOSOMIASIS** (a chronic disease caused by flatworms, mostly in African countries)

MALARIA (www.who.int)

Today approximately 40% of the world's population mostly those living in the world's poorest countries is at risk of malaria. Malaria causes more than 300 million acute illnesses and at least one million deaths annually. 90% of deaths due to malaria occur in Africa south of the Sahara mostly among young children. Malaria kills an African child every 30 seconds. Many children who survive an episode of severe malaria may suffer from learning impairments or brain damage. Pregnant women and their unborn children are also particularly vulnerable to malaria, which is a major cause of perinatal mortality, low birth weight and maternal anaemia.

- aims to eradicate **POLIO** (a viral paralytic disease, causes muscle weakness and often paralysis) within the next few years; WHO have reduced the number of annual diagnosed cases from hundreds of thousands to around a thousand

CURRENT ACTIVITIES, PROGRAMMES, IMPORTANT MATTERS

- **Pakistan earthquake**

Shelter and safe water remain a top priority; 21 October 2005 -- WHO and partners are working in Pakistan to airlift seriously injured people from Muzaffarabad to Islamabad, and to reach people in remote areas. More

than 25 teams have begun vaccinating children against tetanus. However provision of safe water and shelter remains the highest priority.

– **Tsunami**

WHO monitored risks to public health through the early warning of disease threats and the timely organization of any necessary response; supported the health sector response and assisted in the recovery and rehabilitation of the countries' health system, including replacement of lost assets and provision of technical expertise.

– **Avian influenza/bird flu and other influenza** (WHO global influenza programme)

VISION: Effective and timely influenza surveillance in all regions of the world; Antigenic and genetic match of influenza vaccine and current circulating influenza viruses; Efficient national influenza control strategies and campaigns; Sufficient influenza vaccines made available before and during pandemics and epidemics

Avian influenza ACTIONS: monitoring the situation, informing the public, recommending actions (for individuals and countries), stockpiling vaccines (in this case for example the so called "oseltamivir")

– **AIDS**

<http://www.unaids.org/> - The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

– **Cancer**

promotion and strengthening of comprehensive national cancer control programmes, building international networks and partnerships for cancer control, promotion of organized, evidence-based interventions for early detection of cervical and breast cancer, development of guidelines on disease and programme management, advocacy for a rational approach to effective treatments for potentially curable tumours, support for low-cost approaches to respond to global needs for pain relief and palliative care.