



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **New COVID-19 Law Lab to provide vital legal information and support for the global COVID-19 response**

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New York/Geneva—Launching today, the COVID-19 Law Lab initiative gathers and shares legal documents from over 190 countries across the world to help states establish and implement strong legal frameworks to manage the pandemic. The goal is to ensure that laws protect the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities and that they adhere to international human rights standards.

The new Lab (at [www.COVIDLawLab.org](http://www.COVIDLawLab.org)) is a joint project of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law at Georgetown University.

Well-designed laws can help build strong health systems; evaluate and approve safe and effective drugs and vaccines; and enforce actions to create healthier and safer public spaces and workplaces. Critically, they are key to effective implementation of the WHO International Health Regulations: surveillance; infection prevention and control; management of travel and trade; and implementation of measures to maintain essential health services.

“Laws and policies that are grounded in science, evidence and human rights can enable people to access health services, protect themselves from COVID-19 and live free from stigma, discrimination and violence,” says Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator. “The COVID-19 Law Lab is an important tool for sharing good practices on laws and policies.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen a vast increase in urgent legislative action to control and reduce the pandemic.

“Strong legal frameworks are critical for national COVID-19 responses,” said Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. “Laws that impact health often fall outside the health sector. As health is global, legal frameworks should be aligned with international commitments to respond to current and emerging public health risks. A strong foundation of law for health is more important now than ever before.”

However, laws that are poorly designed, implemented, or enforced can harm marginalized populations, entrench stigma and discrimination, and hinder efforts to end the pandemic.

“Harmful laws can exacerbate stigma and discrimination, infringe on people’s rights and undermine public health responses,” according to Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of UNAIDS. “To ensure responses to the pandemic are effective, humane and sustainable, governments must use the law as a tool to uphold the human rights and dignity of people affected by COVID-19.”

The COVID-19 Law Lab is a database of laws that countries have implemented in response to the pandemic. It includes state of emergency declarations, quarantine measures, disease surveillance, legal measures relating to mask-wearing, social distancing, and access to medication and vaccines. The database will continue to grow as more countries and themes are added.

It will also feature research on different legal frameworks for COVID-19. These analyses will focus on the human rights impacts of public health laws and help countries identify best practices to guide their immediate responses to COVID-19 and socioeconomic recovery efforts once the pandemic is under control. It builds off the work of the UHC Legal Solutions Network, which was established to help countries achieve universal health coverage through the implementation of rights-based legal frameworks.

“We need to track and evaluate how laws and policies are being used during the Pandemic to understand what works,” said Dr. Matthew M. Kavanagh, faculty in Georgetown University’s Department of International Health. Katie Gottschalk, Executive Director of the O’Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law at Georgetown University Law Center added, “We must learn lessons from the early stage of pandemic policies to implement the most effective laws going forward – the COVID-19 Law Lab allows us to do just that.”

### **About UNDP**

UNDP is the leading United Nations organization fighting to end the injustice of poverty, inequality, and climate change. Working with our broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, we help nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and planet. Learn more at [undp.org](https://undp.org) or follow at @UNDP.

### **About WHO**

The **World Health Organization** provides global leadership in public health within the United Nations system. Founded in 1948, WHO works with 194 Member States, across six regions and from more than 150 offices, to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable. Our goal for 2019-2023 is to ensure that a billion more people have universal health coverage, to protect a billion more people from health emergencies, and provide a further billion people with better health and wellbeing. For updates on COVID-19 and public health advice to protect yourself from coronavirus, visit [www.who.int](https://www.who.int) and follow WHO on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), [TikTok](#), [Pinterest](#), [Snapchat](#), [YouTube](#)

### **About UNAIDS**

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Learn more at [unaids.org](https://unaids.org) and connect with us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

**O’Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law and Georgetown University**

The O'Neill Institute, housed at Georgetown University, was established to create innovative solutions to the most pressing national and international health concerns, with the essential vision that the law has been, and will remain, a fundamental tool for solving critical health problems. The Georgetown University Department of International Health is home to scholarship in public health, economics, political science, and medicine. Georgetown's Global Health Initiative serves as a university-wide platform for developing concrete solutions to the health challenges facing families and communities throughout the world. Read more at [oneillinstitute.org](http://oneillinstitute.org) and connect with us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

### **About the UHC Legal Solutions Network**

The COVID-19 Law lab is a product of the UHC Legal Solutions Network is a collaboration between the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), and the O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law at Georgetown University. The initiative aims to support countries to achieve universal health coverage by working with policymakers, civil society groups and other stakeholders to craft laws ensure that all people and communities have the right to access the promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health services they need, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship.

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