



for applying the precautionary principle and assuming that in any outbreak caused by a new pathogen of this type, sustained human-to-human transmission will occur unless the evidence specifically indicates otherwise.

The Panel's conclusion is that the alert system does not operate with sufficient speed when faced with a fast-moving respiratory pathogen, that the legally binding IHR (2005) are a conservative instrument as currently constructed and serve to constrain rather than facilitate rapid action and that the precautionary principle was not applied to the early alert evidence when it should have been.

The Panel's view is that the definition of a new suspected outbreak with pandemic potential needs to be refined, as different classes of pathogen have very different implications for the speed with which they are likely to spread and their implications for the type of response needed.

4.2.3 Two worlds at different speeds

The chronology of the early events in raising the alarm about COVID-19 show two worlds operating at very different speeds. One is the world of fast-paced information and data-sharing. Open digital platforms for epidemic surveillance, in which WHO plays a leading role, constantly update and share outbreak information. Digital tools are now core elements in disease surveillance and alert, sifting through vast quantities of instantly available information. Epidemic surveillance operates symbiotically with information exchange – the constant pace of news, gossip and rumour that characterize social media and can be mined for epidemic-relevant signals. Open data on the information and