



**World Health
Organization**

Western Pacific

Region's leaders gather virtually to tackle COVID-19 and other health issues, chart WHO's work in the Western Pacific

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Health ministers and senior officials from countries and areas across Asia and the Pacific are gathering virtually this week to agree actions on health issues of the region and chart priorities for the World Health Organization (WHO) in the Western Pacific.

The seventy-first session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific is being held online from 6 to 9 October 2020. On the opening day, WHO briefed countries on the COVID-19 situation in the Region and our work to support responses. Delegates shared updates on the current situation and needs.

In his opening remarks, Dr Takeshi Kasai, WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific, said “Last year, we gathered in Manila and talked about how, together, we would work towards addressing the challenges facing our Region in the future. None of us could have imagined how quickly the future would arrive. COVID-19 is the most challenging public health event we have seen in 100 years – and it is testing not only the capacity of our health systems, but also the resilience of our societies and economies. But I’m proud of the spirit of solidarity that has characterized interactions between

countries of our Region over the past 9 months. In these difficult times, countries have come together in a spirit of cooperation and collaboration – borne out of a recognition that no country in our Region is safe until every country is safe.”

WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a video message for the Region's health ministers: “The COVID-19 pandemic has upended our health systems, societies, and economies. This new virus may have originated in the Western Pacific, but so far, your region has reported the fewest cases and deaths. This is no accident. Many countries in the Western Pacific Region are an example for the rest of the world of the long-term benefits of investing in emergency preparedness and response. Through painful past experience, many of your countries have developed a strong 'muscle memory' that has helped you to prevent infections and save lives. But all countries must remain vigilant. The virus is still circulating and most people remain susceptible.”

Later this week, health ministers and senior officials will deliberate and are expected to adopt resolutions to address:

- Inequitable access to immunization to stop vaccine preventable diseases
- Limited access to safe and affordable surgery, despite its critical role in reducing deaths and disability
- Health and social implications of ageing and the needs of current and future populations.

Delegates will also note progress made in the Region in five additional areas:

- Health security, including antimicrobial resistance
- Noncommunicable diseases such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes
- Climate change, the environment and health
- Reaching the unreached with services to prevent and treat dengue, malaria and other neglected tropical diseases
- Driving WHO's vision of its work, *For the Future: Towards the Healthiest and Safest Region*, adopted at last year's Regional Committee.

Dr Francisco T. Duque III, Secretary of Health of the Philippines, was elected Chair of this year's session. Dr Ifereimi Waqainabete, Minister of Health and Medical Services of Fiji, was elected Vice Chair.

Notes to editors

A live stream of the Regional Committee proceedings, official documents, fact sheets and videos on the issues to be addressed this week can be accessed here:

www.who.int/westernpacific/about/governance/regional-committee/session-71

For updates, follow @WHOWPRO on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#) and the hashtag #RCM71.

Working with 194 Member States across six regions, WHO is the United Nations specialized agency responsible for public health. Each WHO region has its own regional committee – a governing body composed of ministers of health and senior officials from the region's Member States. Each regional committee meets annually. This year, because of COVID-19, they are meeting virtually for the first time.

The 37 countries and areas of the WHO Western Pacific Region: Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Cook Islands, Fiji, France (which has responsibility for French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna), Hong Kong SAR (China), Japan, Kiribati, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Macao SAR (China), Malaysia, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Mongolia, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (which has responsibility for Pitcairn Islands), the United States of America (which has responsibility for American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Guam), Vanuatu, and Viet Nam.

Related links:

- [COVID-19 in the Western Pacific Region](#)
- [Speech of the Regional Director at the seventy-first session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific](#)
- [Report of the Regional Director for the Western Pacific, 1 July 2019–30 June 2020](#)
- [For the Future, towards the healthiest and safest Region: A vision for the WHO work with Member States and partners in the Western Pacific](#)