Chapter 2
The Mothership:
The World Health Organization (WHO)

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed critical gaps in global health preparedness. This chapter traces the virus's spread from China and analyzes global response strategies, highlighting both achievements and failures. Despite the revised International Health Regulations (IHR 2005), responses remained reactive, delaying containment and allowing widespread transmission. The chapter discusses the virus's evolving strains, vaccination efforts, and the need for continued research. It critiques delays in early reporting, inadequate surveillance, and weaknesses in the responses of the WHO and national governments. Emphasis is placed on the necessity of overhauling global health frameworks, particularly improving multinational electronic health record interoperability and strengthening core health system capacities. The pandemic serves as a warning and a catalyst for reform.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019 sent shockwaves through the global community, sparking an unparalleled response as nations scrambled to contain the spread of the Virus and mitigate its devastating impact. This chapter offers a comprehensive overview of the global response to COVID-19, tracing its trajectory from the first reported cases to the subsequent evolution of strategies and policies. By examining the successes and shortcomings of international efforts, particularly considering the revisions made to the 2005 International Health Regulations, we aim to glean valuable insights that can inform more effective planning and preparedness for future pandemics. In dissecting the various challenges faced and

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lessons learned throughout the COVID-19 crisis, we endeavor to lay a foundation for proactive measures that can safeguard against the emergence and proliferation of novel infectious diseases, thereby mitigating the potential for future global health catastrophes.

CURRENT STATE OF COVID-19

As of May 2024, Covid has not been eradicated; however, with the help of global research, vaccinations have slowed down the spread and reduced the number of deaths. While this is great news, the Virus continues to grow into new strains, requiring continued research and testing to prevent new pandemics.

Table 1. Omicron and sub-variants Covid-19

VARIANT	YEAR
Omicron	2020-2024
JN-1	2024
Delta	2022
Alpha	2021/2022
Beta	2020/2021
Gamma	2020/2021
Epsilon	2021
Eta	2021
Iota	2021
Kappa	2021
Zeta	2021
Mu	2021

At the close of 2019, the initial instances of COVID-19 emerged in China, stemming from the SARS-CoV-2 virus and then manifesting with a spectrum of symptoms, ranging from mild to severe. Symptoms included fever, cough, difficulty breathing, fatigue, body aches, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. For patients with underlying medical conditions, COVID-19 could last for weeks and, in many cases, can be deadly (cdc.gov; Carter et al., 2023). Mutations in Omicron COVID-19 brought about new strains, including Delta, Alpha, Gamma, and Beta (2020), Omicron (2021), Delta (2021), Alpha, Gamma, and Beta, JN.1 (2023) (CDC, 2023).