

Three States and New York City Join Global Disease Response Network

The move comes after the US withdrawal from the World Health Organization.

March 19, 2026 By Stateline and Shalina Chatlani

In an extraordinary break from the federal government, the public health departments of at least three states and New York City are joining the global alert network of the World Health Organization, spurred by President Donald Trump's decision to remove the United States from the United Nations agency responsible for coordinating international public health.

So far, the state public health departments in California, Illinois, New York, as well as the public health agency in New York City, have joined the [Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network](#) (GOARN), which is part of the World Health Organization (WHO). The U.S. officially left the WHO this past January.

California joined GOARN in January, while Illinois, New York state and New York City joined last month.

GOARN, which includes more than 310 national public health agencies, United Nations agencies, academic institutions, and nongovernmental groups, helps identify and manage infectious disease outbreaks worldwide. Since it was established in 2000, GOARN says it has helped manage more than 175 global health emergencies across 114 countries.

GOARN maintains relationships with some medical and research institutions in the U.S., including the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine in New Orleans and university medical centers in Nebraska and Texas. Until now, however, state public health agencies have not been members, because they relied on the U.S. government's participation in GOARN for information on global outbreaks.

Dr. Ali Khan, a medical epidemiologist who is the dean of the College of Public Health at the University of Nebraska Medical Center and a former member of the GOARN steering committee, said the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how "disease has no borders" and the importance of sharing information globally to quash the spread of contagious diseases.

Khan said the Trump administration's withdrawal from the WHO "throttles the information from WHO to the U.S. government, specifically the [federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention],

and which then flows to states. Those states are now left in a position where they're joining the GOARN."

"Let's be clear, it doesn't substitute for the U.S. withdrawal from the WHO, but it does allow states to directly get information about what's going on globally that may impact their own citizens. So it allows them to sort of keep their own radar on when the U.S. has decided to no longer participate in this global information sharing."

In explaining its decision to withdraw from WHO, the Trump administration [said](#) the U.S. had "for decades carried a disproportionate share of the organization's financial burden." It insisted the country would "continue to ensure detection and response to infectious disease outbreaks" without being a member of the organization.

"These are the same democrat-led states and cities that imposed unscientific school closures, toddler mask mandates, and vaccine passports during the COVID era," Andrew Nixon, a spokesperson for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, wrote in an email.

"They are the ones who destroyed public trust in public health that we are now restoring. We are working with the White House in a deliberative, interagency process on the path forward for global health and foreign assistance that first and foremost protects Americans."

Dr. James McDonald, commissioner of the New York State Department of Health, told Stateline that the department's decision to partner with GOARN was apolitical, and that it makes sense for New York because the state is "the world's gateway to the country."

"Everybody comes to the United States. Many come through JFK [John F. Kennedy International Airport], but an outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo does matter to me, so learning about it sooner helps protect New Yorkers and also helps protect the United States," McDonald said.

McDonald added that New York is a part of a new public health consortium of Northeast states — the Northeast Public Health Collaborative — and plans to share any information it gathers from GOARN with fellow members Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. New York City also is a member of the consortium.

"One of the things about scientists and health care providers is we're used to just sharing information with each other, sharing knowledge. It's not political," McDonald said.

Doua Yang, a spokesperson for the California Department of Public Health, said that even before officially joining GOARN in January, the agency had been attending weekly operational calls for several months, and even made a presentation on how it has handled bird flu outbreaks.

"As the fourth-largest economy in the world, California cannot afford to let down its guard, or its people," Yang wrote in an email. "Participating with GOARN is one step California is taking to maintain uninterrupted communication with WHO and protect the state from potential health

threats.”

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