STUDY NOTES · BASIC CONCEPT

What Is Air Suvidha 2.0? International Health Regulations, Public Health Surveillance and Pandemic Preparedness

Society & Social Justice

03 Nov 2026

Introduction

Globalisation has increased the movement of people, goods and services across international borders. While international travel supports tourism, trade, education and economic growth, it can also facilitate the geographical spread of infectious diseases.

An infectious disease emerging in one country may spread to other regions through international travel before health authorities fully understand its transmission patterns. Therefore, early detection, timely information-sharing and coordinated public health responses are essential.

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Air Suvidha 2.0 is an online passenger health self-declaration platform developed by the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Delhi International Airport Limited, in collaboration with the Directorate General of Health Services under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

The platform was launched in June 2026 to strengthen public health surveillance at India's points of entry during the reported Ebola/Bundibugyo virus disease outbreak.

What Is Air Suvidha 2.0?

Air Suvidha 2.0 is a digital system through which international passengers arriving in India submit a health self-declaration before immigration clearance.

The platform is designed to support public health authorities in identifying travellers who may require further assessment because of their travel history, exposure or symptoms.

Key information collected

The self-declaration may include:

1. **Passenger details:** Information needed to identify the traveller and connect the declaration with the journey.
2. **Flight information:** Relevant details about the international journey.

3. **Recent travel history:** Information about places visited during the specified period, including the 21-day travel history required under the applicable declaration.
4. **Exposure history:** Information relevant to possible contact with an infectious disease.
5. **Symptoms:** Details of relevant symptoms, where applicable.

The information helps authorities assess potential health risks and determine whether further screening, referral or other public health measures may be necessary.

How does the process work?

1. **Submission:** The traveller completes the online Self-Declaration Form through the official Air Suvidha 2.0 portal.
2. **Digital record:** The traveller downloads the completed declaration or acknowledgment.
3. **Information-sharing:** Relevant information is made available to designated health and surveillance authorities.
4. **Arrival verification:** The traveller presents the downloaded declaration at the designated International Travel Health Desk or immigration counter, as instructed.
5. **Risk assessment:** Authorities may conduct further assessment if the declaration or other information indicates a potential health risk.

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The government has advised passengers to complete the form before boarding. The official announcement states that the form can be completed up to 24 hours before arrival in India.

The declaration is a health-screening mechanism; it does not replace the passport, visa or other applicable entry requirements.

Why Is Air Suvidha 2.0 Important?

1. Early Detection of Health Risks

Travel history and exposure information can help authorities identify passengers who may have travelled through areas affected by an infectious disease.

Early identification can support timely medical assessment and reduce delays in initiating appropriate public health measures.

2. Faster Public Health Coordination

A digital system can share relevant information with multiple authorities without requiring repeated manual entry.

Air Suvidha 2.0 supports information-sharing with:

- Airport Health Officers.
- Bureau of Immigration.
- Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP).
- State Surveillance Officers.

This can help connect airport screening with wider disease-surveillance arrangements.

3. Contactless Processing

Digital declarations can reduce dependence on physical forms and help streamline information collection.

However, contactless processing does not mean that every passenger will automatically receive clearance without further assessment. Additional screening may be required depending on the applicable health advisories and individual circumstances.

4. Better Emergency Preparedness

During an infectious disease outbreak, authorities need to identify possible exposure, assess health risks and coordinate medical referrals.

Digital systems can provide useful information for these activities, particularly when international travel involves passengers from multiple locations.

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5. Risk-Based Public Health Measures

Health declarations can help authorities direct attention towards travellers who may require further assessment rather than treating all situations as identical.

Risk assessment must be based on current epidemiological information and applicable government instructions.

What Is Public Health Surveillance?

Public health surveillance is the continuous and systematic collection, analysis, interpretation and dissemination of health-related information for public health action.

Its objective is to detect health threats, monitor disease patterns and guide preventive measures.

Major types of surveillance

1. Passive Surveillance

Healthcare providers and laboratories routinely report cases to public health authorities.

It is relatively economical but may miss cases if reporting is incomplete.

2. Active Surveillance

Health authorities proactively seek information by contacting healthcare facilities, reviewing records or conducting targeted investigations.

It may identify cases more quickly but requires greater resources.

3. Sentinel Surveillance

Selected hospitals, laboratories or healthcare facilities report specific diseases or health indicators.

It provides useful information about trends but may not represent the entire population.

4. Syndromic Surveillance

Authorities monitor symptoms or clinical patterns that may indicate an emerging outbreak, sometimes before a final diagnosis is available.

5. Digital and Event-Based Surveillance

Digital platforms, electronic health records, laboratory systems and reports of unusual health events can help identify signals requiring investigation.

Air Suvidha 2.0 is primarily a digital passenger health-declaration and information-sharing mechanism that supports surveillance at points of entry.

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What Are Points of Entry?

Points of Entry are locations through which people, conveyances and goods enter or leave a country.

They are important for international public health because travellers may arrive from areas experiencing different disease risks.

Major types

1. International airports.
2. Seaports.
3. Designated land-border crossings.

Public health measures at these locations may include health declarations, screening, medical assessment, referral and the provision of health information to travellers.

Not every disease requires the same screening procedure. Measures should reflect the disease, transmission route, current risk assessment and applicable legal requirements.

International Health Regulations, 2005

The **International Health Regulations (IHR), 2005** are a legally binding international framework adopted by WHO Member States to prevent, protect against, control and respond to the international spread of disease while avoiding unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade.

Major objectives

1. Strengthen national capacities to detect and respond to public health risks.
2. Improve international notification and information-sharing.
3. Support coordinated responses to public health emergencies.
4. Establish a framework for public health measures at points of entry.
5. Reduce unnecessary restrictions on international travel and trade while protecting public health.

The IHR are especially important because infectious diseases do not necessarily remain within the country where they first emerge.

What Is a Public Health Emergency of International Concern?

A **Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)** is an extraordinary event determined under the IHR to constitute a public health risk to other states through the international spread of disease and potentially require a coordinated international response.

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The WHO Director-General makes the determination after considering the relevant information and the applicable procedures under the IHR.

A PHEIC declaration is not the same as declaring that every traveller is infected or that every country must impose identical restrictions.

Responsibilities of countries under the IHR

Countries are expected to maintain core public health capacities, assess relevant health events, notify WHO when required and cooperate in responding to international health threats.

The specific response depends on the nature of the event, available scientific evidence and applicable international rules.

What Is the WHO's Role in Global Health Security?

The World Health Organization is a specialised agency of the United Nations responsible for international public health.

Major functions

1. **Disease monitoring:** Collects and analyses information on public health threats.

2. **International coordination:** Facilitates cooperation among countries during outbreaks.
3. **Technical guidance:** Provides recommendations based on available scientific evidence.
4. **Emergency assessment:** Uses established procedures to assess whether events may constitute a PHEIC.
5. **Capacity-building:** Supports countries in strengthening health systems and disease surveillance.
6. **Research and information-sharing:** Encourages the exchange of scientific and epidemiological information.

The WHO does not replace national governments. Countries remain responsible for implementing public health measures within their territories, consistent with applicable law and international obligations.

What Is Ebola and Why Does It Require Public Health Preparedness?

Ebola disease is a severe illness caused by viruses in the genus *Orthoebolavirus*. It can cause serious disease and has been associated with high fatality rates in some outbreaks.

Transmission generally occurs through direct contact with the blood or other bodily fluids of an infected person who is symptomatic, or with contaminated materials. The exact risk depends on the circumstances and stage of illness.

Why is early identification important?

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1. **Medical assessment:** Suspected cases can be assessed and referred for appropriate care.
2. **Infection prevention:** Healthcare workers can apply suitable infection-prevention and control procedures.
3. **Contact tracing:** Relevant contacts can be identified and monitored under public health guidance.
4. **Outbreak containment:** Timely action can help reduce further transmission.
5. **Public communication:** Accurate information can reduce misinformation and encourage appropriate health-seeking behaviour.

The risk to individual travellers depends on factors such as their exposure and the outbreak situation. Travel history alone does not establish that a person is infected.

Air Suvidha 2.0 and the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme

The **Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP)** is an Indian public health surveillance initiative intended to strengthen the identification and monitoring of epidemic-prone diseases.

It supports the collection, analysis and use of disease-related information for timely public health action.

How can digital declarations support disease surveillance?

1. **Information collection:** Declarations provide relevant information about travel and possible exposure.

2. **Risk identification:** Authorities can flag information that may warrant further assessment.
3. **Coordination:** Relevant information can be shared with designated surveillance and health authorities.
4. **Referral:** Travellers who require additional assessment can be directed to appropriate health services.
5. **Follow-up:** Where required and authorised, the information may support further public health action.

Digital declarations are only one component of surveillance. Effective disease detection also requires laboratories, healthcare facilities, trained personnel, epidemiological investigation and reliable reporting.

Challenges and Limitations of Digital Health Screening

1. Accuracy of Self-Reported Information

A health declaration depends partly on the accuracy and completeness of the information provided by travellers. Incorrect or incomplete responses can reduce its usefulness.

2. Privacy and Data Protection

Travel and health information can be sensitive. Authorities should ensure that personal information is collected for legitimate purposes, accessed only by authorised personnel and protected against misuse.

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3. False Positives and False Negatives

A traveller may be flagged despite not being infected, while an infected person may not report symptoms or exposure.

Therefore, a self-declaration cannot independently confirm or rule out infection.

4. Coordination Between Agencies

Information may be less effective if health authorities, immigration officials and surveillance agencies do not have clear procedures for sharing and acting on it.

5. Digital Accessibility

Passengers may face difficulties due to limited internet access, language barriers, disability or unfamiliarity with online forms.

Appropriate assistance and accessible procedures are important to avoid unnecessary exclusion.

6. Risk of Excessive Restrictions

Health measures that are not proportionate to the actual risk can create unnecessary delays and disrupt travel.

Public health interventions should be evidence-based, proportionate and consistent with applicable legal obligations.

Measures to Strengthen International Health Surveillance

1. Improve Digital Infrastructure

Platforms should be reliable, accessible and capable of securely sharing relevant information with authorised public health agencies.

2. Strengthen Laboratory Capacity

Timely laboratory testing and accurate diagnosis remain important for confirming suspected infections.

3. Train Airport Personnel

Health and immigration staff should receive clear protocols for identifying potential risks, protecting confidential information and referring travellers for further assessment.

4. Improve International Cooperation

Countries should exchange timely information about outbreaks and coordinate responses under the applicable international framework.

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5. Protect Personal Data

Authorities should establish appropriate access controls, cybersecurity safeguards, retention rules and accountability mechanisms.

6. Maintain Accessible Procedures

Travellers who require assistance should have access to clear instructions and appropriate support.

7. Use Evidence-Based Screening

Screening measures should be reviewed as the epidemiological situation changes. Self-declarations should complement other public health tools rather than being treated as a substitute for them.

Conclusion

Air Suvidha 2.0 illustrates how digital platforms can support health surveillance at international points of entry. By collecting relevant travel and health information and facilitating coordination among designated agencies, it can contribute to the early identification of potential risks.

However, digital declarations alone cannot prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Their effectiveness depends on accurate information, laboratory and clinical capacity, data protection, trained personnel and international cooperation.

A balanced approach should protect public health while respecting individual rights and avoiding unnecessary disruption to international travel

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