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Précis – Future Trends

Global pandemics are likely to occur more frequently in the future. As we saw with COVID-19, global connectedness means disease transmission can occur rapidly and is difficult to contain. COVID-19 was first detected in China in December 2019 and by March 2020 had spread around the globe and was considered a pandemic.¹ COVID-19 caused massive disruptions, loss of lives, economic losses, mental health impacts, and more. I think this is an important issue because unfortunately, global pandemics are likely to happen again and they could have consequences as bad, or worse than, the COVID-19 pandemic.

One article identified five key factors that will play a role in the frequency of pandemics, including travel and connectivity, urbanization, climate change, increased human-animal contact, and shortage of health workers.² Through global connectivity, travel has become cheaper and more accessible, meaning more people are traveling around the world. Most of the world's population lives in urban areas, and this is expected to increase over time. Climate change can impact the natural range of insects and animals. This can increase human-animal contact; additionally, as populations continue to grow, humans move into animal habitats which also increases human-animal contact. Finally, healthcare workers commonly migrate from low- and middle-income countries which reduces the healthcare workforce in areas that are already prone to worse health outcomes.²

It would take great effort in each of these areas to minimize the risk of a future pandemic, however it is unlikely that progress will be made in any of these areas. Further, countries should work together to share learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic. Responses differed significantly from country to country, and these learnings could help the world to better prepare for future pandemics. I think most countries will still take a siloed approach to pandemic preparedness within their country, however would take into account learnings from other places around the world.

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References

¹ Singh S, McNab C, McKeon R, et al. How an outbreak became a pandemic: a chronological analysis of crucial junctures and international obligations in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Health Policy*. 2021;398(10316):2109-2124.

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)01897-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)01897-3/fulltext)

² Haileamlak A. Pandemics will be more frequent. *Ethiop J Health Sci*. 2022;32(2):228.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9175207/#:~:text=Several%20factors%20do%20play%20role,another%20within%20a%20few%20hours>.