



Food and Agriculture  
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INFOSAN members' guide. Web Annex

# Template for INFOSAN/IHR Communication:

national protocol for information  
sharing with national and international  
partners during food safety events and  
outbreaks of foodborne illness



International Food  
Safety Authorities  
Network

INFOSAN members' guide. Web Annex. Template for INFOSAN/IHR communication: national protocol for information sharing with national and international partners during food safety events and outbreaks of foodborne illness

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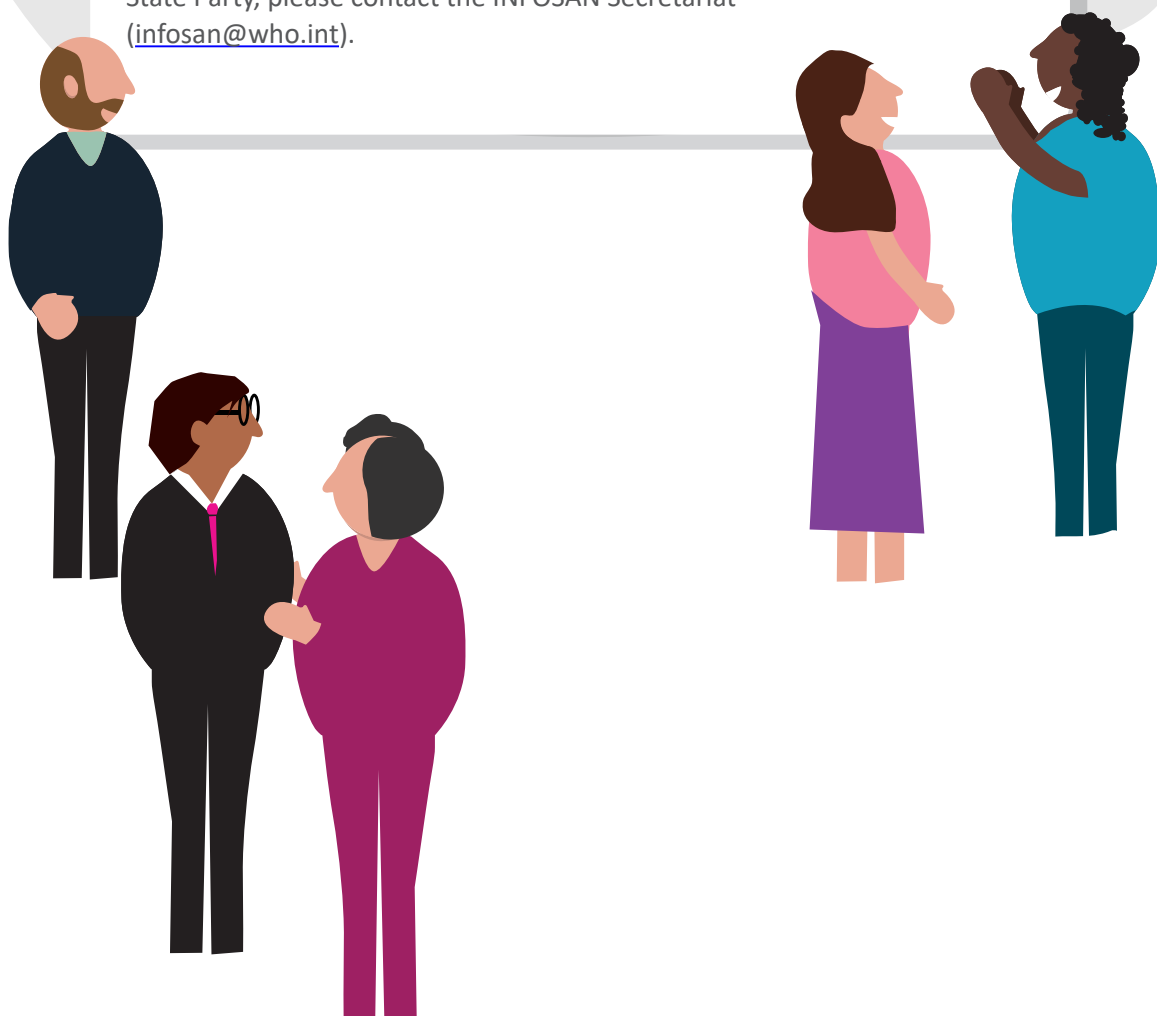
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# How to use this document

The following text can serve as a starting point for the development of a national protocol for information sharing among various stakeholders involved in food safety emergency response in your State Party. This includes members of the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN), the International Health Regulations (IHR 2005) National Focal Point (NFP), and other stakeholders as appropriate. The final document, when adapted to your national context, should provide a clear guidance about the procedures for communication between domestic authorities, as well as the World Health Organization (WHO), including the INFOSAN Secretariat.

The **red text** below should be edited to reflect your national context. The black text may also need revision, but is written in a generic way that may hold true for many State Parties.

Should you require assistance with the adaptation of this template in your State Party, please contact the INFOSAN Secretariat ([infosan@who.int](mailto:infosan@who.int)).



# Preamble

The global nature and growing complexity of the food chain means that risks posed by unsafe foods have the potential to quickly evolve from a local problem to an international incident in a short period of time. Collaborating with international agencies thus becomes increasingly important, to ensure the rapid and accurate transfer of information to food safety and public health partners globally.

# Objective

The objective of this protocol is to outline the roles, responsibilities, reporting mechanisms and requirements for each of the national partners during a food safety / foodborne illness event with international implications. It describes how information is shared by national partners in <<State Party X>> with international partners, including foreign food safety authorities, the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) and the World Health Organization (WHO) International Health Regulations (IHR) Contact Point.

# Roles and Responsibilities

**INFOSAN:** The International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) is a joint FAO/WHO entity which assists Member States in managing food safety risks and in ensuring rapid sharing of information during food safety emergencies. The aim is to stop the spread of contaminated food from one State Party to another. INFOSAN also facilitates the sharing of experiences and tested solutions at the national level and between State Parties in order to optimize future interventions to protect the health of consumers. National authorities of 190 Member States are part of this network. The INFOSAN Emergency Contact Point (ECP) is responsible for reporting urgent food safety events and responding to verification requests from the INFOSAN Secretariat. INFOSAN Focal Points (FP) work with the INFOSAN ECP on food safety events, share information and disseminate information from INFOSAN as appropriate. The INFOSAN ECP for <<State Party X>> is located in the <<Ministry X, Agency X, Department X, etc.>>. Focal Points have been designated from <<Ministry Y, Agency Y, Department Y, etc.>> and <<Ministry Z, Agency Z, Department Z, etc.>>. Appendix 1 provides the contact details for the INFOSAN ECP and FPs in <<State Party X>>. Appendix 2 outlines the roles and responsibilities of ECP and FPs within INFOSAN.

**IHR:** The International Health Regulations (IHR 2005) are an international legal instrument that is binding on 196 States Parties across the globe, including all Member States of the WHO. The purpose and scope of these Regulations are to prevent, protect against, control and provide a public health response to the international spread of disease in ways that are commensurate with and restricted to public health risks, and which avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade. Pursuant to the IHR, each State Party must establish or designate a National IHR Focal Point (NFP). The NFP is the national centre or office which is accessible at all times for IHR related communications with WHO IHR Contact Point and all relevant sectors of the State Party's administration. The IHR NFP for <<State Party X>> is located at <<Ministry X, Agency X, Department X, etc.>>. <<Insert contact details of NFP>>

<<Insert main functions of the agency where the ECP is designated as they relate to food safety>>

For example: The **National Food Safety Authority** delivers all national inspection and enforcement services related to food in the State Party. Legislation covers all stages of the food continuum ensuring risks to food safety are mitigated. The National Food Safety Authority's contribution to the investigation and control of foodborne illness outbreaks includes food safety investigation, testing and recall activities, as well as regulatory compliance and enforcement activities. The food safety investigations provide the basis for the assessment of risk and the development of appropriate risk management strategies to control affected products. The INFOSAN ECP is stationed here.

<<Insert main functions of the agencies where a FP is designated as they relate to food safety>>

For example: The **Department of Health** is the national department responsible for helping all citizens maintain and improve their health. With respect to food safety, the Department of Health's primary responsibilities include setting standards and regulations, and conducting, upon request, health risk assessments on food-related hazards for the National Food Safety Authority or other stakeholders (e.g. sub-national governments). An INFOSAN FP is stationed here.

For example: The **National Public Health Authority** promotes and protects the health of all citizens. Among its activities is the coordination of responses to national outbreaks of foodborne illness. An INFOSAN FP is stationed here. This agency is also where the IHR NFP is stationed. <<explain the different units, functions, etc.>>

# Reporting mechanisms and requirements

## Verification requests

When necessary, the INFOSAN Secretariat at WHO may request the INFOSAN ECP to validate or verify information regarding an event. Similarly, the WHO IHR Contact Point may request verification of information from the IHR NFP (under IHR article 10). When this occurs, the receiving State Party will engage with the relevant national authorities, as appropriate, and in relation to their respective mandates while respecting the 24-hour timeline to provide available public health information as required by Article 10 of the IHR.

## Reporting of issues to international partners

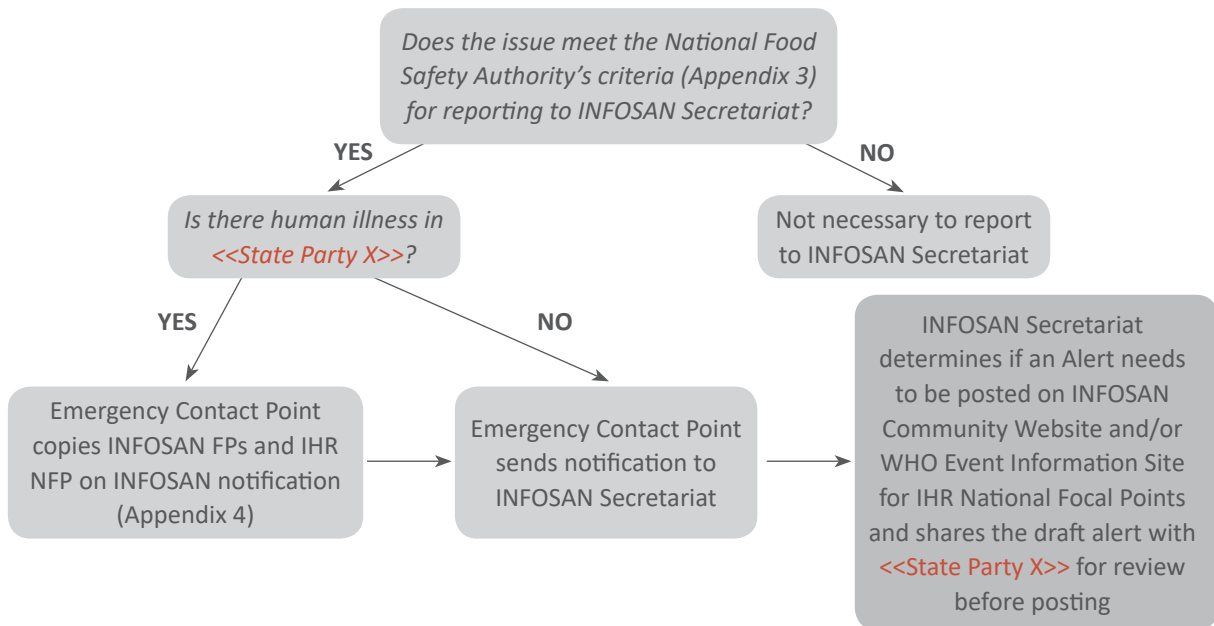
The mechanism by which <<State Party X>> reports an event is dependent upon its nature. Figure 1 provides a flow diagram to assist in determining whether reporting should occur via the INFOSAN and/or IHR network.

## Reports to INFOSAN

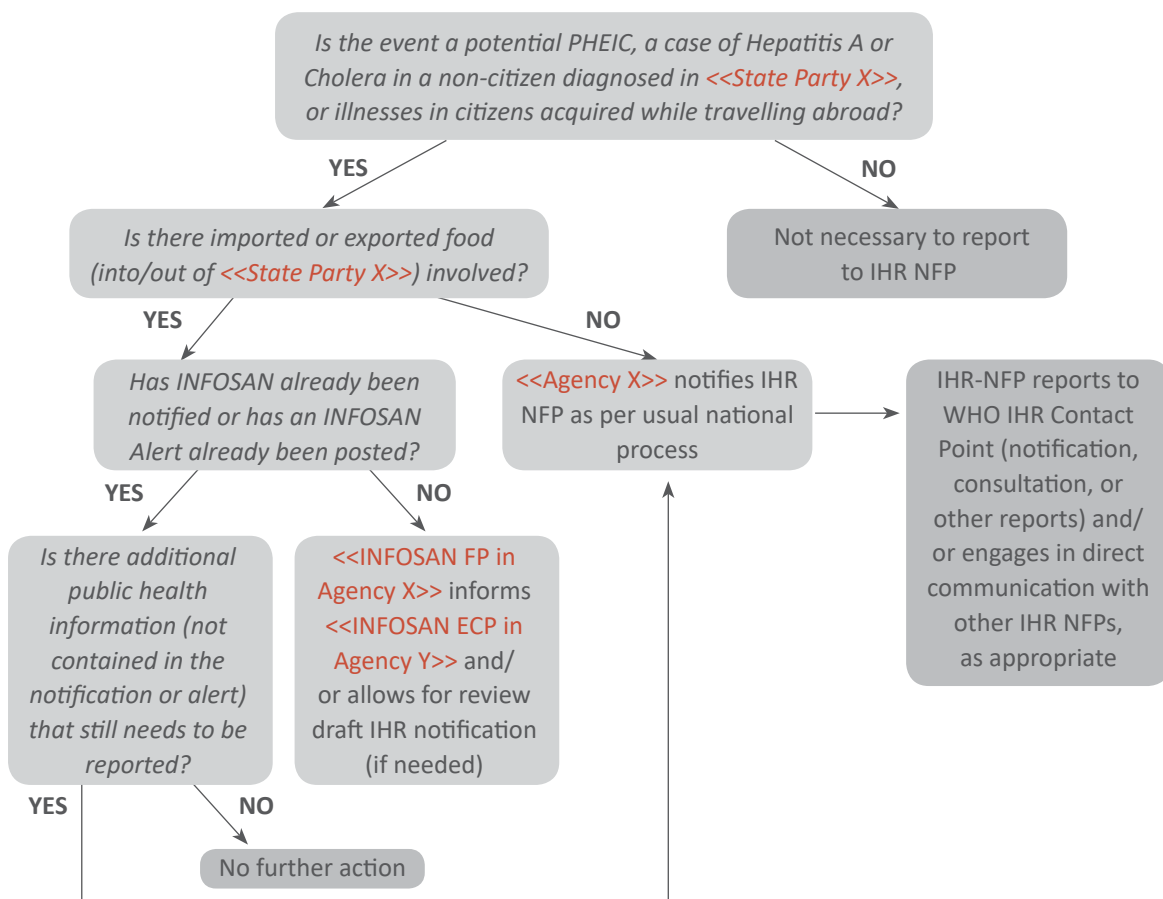
The INFOSAN ECP at <<Agency X>> will notify the INFOSAN Secretariat at WHO of significant food safety events and certain food product recalls as outlined in Appendix 3. In all instances, when information shared with INFOSAN contains information on actual human illness, officials from the <<Public Health Authority>> will be copied on the notification. The INFOSAN Secretariat may subsequently determine that an alert needs to be posted on both the INFOSAN Community Website and/or the WHO Event Information Site for IHR NFPs. In such situations, the INFOSAN Secretariat will share the draft alert with the ECP in <<State Party X>>, who will consult with other FPs in <<Agency Y, Z, etc.>> if the alert contains details on actual human illness. If there is additional public health information that should be reported (and not contained in the INFOSAN alert), this should be reported to WHO separately through one of the IHR communication mechanisms (notification, consultation, other reports) described below.

Figure 1: Decision trees for determining whether to report via INFOSAN and/or IHR

**A. National Food Recall in <<State Party X>>**



**B. Human foodborne disease cases in <<State Party X>>**



## Communication with WHO (under the IHR)

There are numerous types of reports which are required to be sent to WHO by the IHR NFP under the IHR (2005); however, for the purposes of this protocol, the following types of notification and information sharing are most likely to occur:

- In <<State Party X>>, all events of potential international public health concern have to be assessed for potential notification within 48 hours of the State Party becoming aware of it at the national level. Under Article 6 of the IHR, notifications must occur within 24 hours of assessment by the State Party using the decision instrument provided in Annex 2 of the Regulations. Appendix 5 contains the Annex 2 decision instrument and examples for its application. Information shared with the WHO may include public health information such as case definitions, laboratory results, source and type of risk, numbers of cases and deaths, conditions affecting the spread of the disease and the health measures employed in response to the event and when necessary, the difficulties faced and support needed in responding to the potential public health emergency of international concern. Please refer to Appendix 6 for a template for the notification of events.
- For unusual or unexpected public health events within <<State Party X>>, irrespective of origin or source, as defined under Article 7 of the IHR, the relevant health programme area should consider keeping WHO informed to allow for rapid assessment and early warning of an event that has the potential to become an international concern.
- Furthermore, through the NFP, States Parties must, as far as is practicable, inform WHO within 24 hours of receipt of evidence of public health risks identified outside their territories that may cause international disease spread, as manifested by exported or imported human cases, vectors that may carry infection or contamination, or contaminated goods (Article 9.2).
- In the case of events occurring within its territory not requiring notification as provided in Article 6, the State Party may keep WHO advised thereof and consult with WHO on appropriate health measures (Article 8 Consultation).
- In addition to notifications under Article 6, consultations under Article 8, and information sharing under Articles 7 and 9, the NFP may also send bilateral information sharing notices to other State Parties under Article 44 of the IHR.
- Under the Article 10 of the IHR, WHO may request verification from a State Party of reports from sources other than official notifications or consultations of events which may constitute a PHEIC allegedly occurring in the State's territory. [For example, if WHO received a report from State Party X or a media report of a significant public health event in State Party Y, WHO could request further information or a verification of the event from State Party Y]. The State Party

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