



Crisis in Preparedness: Laboratories & Frontline Readiness in the Time of Ebola

September 21st, 2026, 4:00PM – 6:00PM

Co-organized by the Mérieux Foundation USA, Weill Cornell Medical College, GHESKIO Centers & PAHO

In partnership with the Pandemic Fund, CEPI, APHL & NYU School of Global Public Health

Two sides of the same coin: building laboratory capabilities to serve the routine needs of the community is an essential element of pandemic prevention, preparedness and response

In the context of climate change, urbanization, and global mobility, public health threats are growing in scale and complexity. This is compounded by economic crisis, misinformation, funding constraints and workforce shortages in laboratory medicine and public health, all weakening the ability of countries to respond effectively. Emergency funding often arrives once the outbreak is underway and there is no time for capacity building.

The current Ebola outbreak in central Africa has highlighted the consequences of weak testing, rapid response and surveillance systems. Delayed detection and under-resourced diagnostic capacity allowed transmission chains to become established before the outbreak was fully recognized.

Recent experiences with Ebola, COVID-19, H5N1 influenza and other emerging and reemerging infectious diseases have demonstrated, advanced national laboratories are essential, but successful response depends on whether community healthcare settings can rapidly recognize an unusual infectious disease, perform appropriate testing, safely handle specimens, communicate effectively with public health authorities, and escalate cases to specialized facilities without delay.

Laboratory capacity is an inherent element of Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response. Yet preparedness is not a stand-alone capability; it must be embedded in the day-to-day operation of clinical laboratories. The systems, infrastructure and expertise developed for routine HIV and TB detection, immunization, prevention and treatment programs can provide the foundation for responding to Antimicrobial Resistance and other emerging and re-emerging health threats.

Maintaining the expertise, equipment, and networks required for emergency response is more cost-effective and efficient than attempting to build them during a crisis. Investments in routine laboratory capacity also deliver benefits that extend beyond outbreak preparedness. A health system capable of controlling naturally occurring infectious disease outbreaks is better positioned to prevent, detect, and respond to the deliberate use of biological agents.

The bottom line: robust laboratory capacity is an essential part of frontline readiness.

Program

4:00 – 4:05	Welcome Remarks <i>Dr. Daniel Fitzgerald, B.H. Kean Professor in Tropical Medicine, Weill Cornell Medicine</i>
4:05 – 4:15	Introductory Comments <i>Dr. Robert Harrington, Stephen and Suzanne Weiss Dean, Weill Cornell Medicine</i> <i>Dr. Robert Sebbag, Vice President of the Mérieux Foundation</i>
4:15 – 4:25	Keynote Address <i>Dr. Jarbas Barbosa da Silva Jr., Director, Pan American Health Organization</i> <i>Dr. Chikwe Ihekweazu, Executive Director, WHO Health Emergencies Programme</i>
4:25 – 5:10	Panel 1 – From Routine Laboratory Systems to Pandemic Preparedness: Regional Perspectives Moderator: <i>Stewart Simonson, Senior Advisor, Global Health Strategies; NYU School of Global Public Health</i> <i>Dr. Ciro Ugarte, Director, Department of Health Emergencies, PAHO</i> <i>Dr. Samia Saad, Senior Advisor to the CEO and Strategic Lead for G7/G20 engagement and for Climate and Health, CEPI</i> <i>Mikaël Garnier-Lavalley, Deputy Executive Head, The Pandemic Fund</i> <i>Dr. Montserrat Arroyo Kuribreña, Deputy Director General for International Science and Standards, World Organisation for Animal Health</i>
5:10 – 5:50	Panel 2 – Building Integrated Laboratory Capacity at the Country Level Moderator: <i>Dr. Jean William Pape, Howard and Carol Holtzmann Professor in Clinical Medicine, Weill Cornell Medicine; Director, GHESKIO Centers</i> <i>Dr. Laura Goodman, Assistant Professor, Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine</i> <i>Dr. Dorothée Lintner, Managing Director, Mérieux Foundation</i> <i>Lucy Maryogo-Robinson, Managing Director, Association of Public Health Laboratories</i> <i>Dr. Raji Tajudeen, Deputy Director General, Africa CDC</i>
5:50 – 6:00	Closing Remarks <i>Dr. Kevin De Cock, former Director, CDC Center for Global Health and CDC program in Kenya</i>
6:00 – 7:00	Reception