

## PRESS RELEASE

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### PUBLICATION

### **WTO Agreements and Public Health – A joint study by the WHO and the WTO Secretariat**

The World Health Organization and the World Trade Organization Secretariat published today a joint study of the relationship between trade rules and public health. The 171-page study *WTO Agreements and Public Health* explains how WTO Agreements relate to different aspects of health policies. It is meant to give a better insight into key issues for those who develop, communicate or debate policy issues related to trade and health. The study covers areas such as drugs and intellectual property rights, food safety, tobacco and many other issues which have been subject to passionate debate. In this joint effort, the first of its kind, WHO and the WTO Secretariat endeavour to set out the facts.

In their foreword, Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, WHO Director-General, and Mr. Mike Moore, WTO Director-General, confirm that "there is much common ground between trade and health." But they also send the message that "health and trade policy-makers can benefit from closer cooperation to ensure coherence between their different areas of responsibilities."

The study explains that countries have the right to take measures to restrict imports or exports of products when this is necessary to protect the health of humans, animals or plants. When liberalizing services, they retain the right to regulate in order to meet national policy objectives, in areas such as health. Eight specific health issues are covered - infectious disease control, food safety, tobacco, environment, access to drugs, health services, food security as well some emerging issues, such as biotechnology – and, in each case, examples of challenges and opportunities in implementing coherent trade and health policies are provided.

"WTO Agreements are sensitive to health issues. In fact, health concerns can take precedence over trade issues. If necessary, governments may put aside WTO commitments in order to protect human life. And, according to WTO jurisprudence, human health has been recognized as being 'important in the highest degree,'" concludes Miguel Rodríguez Mendoza, Deputy Director-General and the principal coordinator for the WTO.

"Good public policy must be based on sound evidence", adds Andrew Cassels, Director of WHO's Strategy Unit. "This study highlights areas where trade and health linkages deserve more careful analysis. It also highlights benefits that are possible when trade and health officials work closely together."

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