

Damage to Pasteur Institute of Iran threatens regional health security

The Pasteur Institute of Iran sustained considerable damage from a series of airstrikes in late March, 2026.¹ This historically important medical institution, founded 106 years ago, has played a key role in combating various human pathogens in the region and has responded to numerous epidemics and pandemics in its history. The Pasteur Institute of Iran houses reference laboratories, departments of vaccine research and production, pathogen surveillance, and outbreak response teams.² WHO confirmed that, following the damage caused by the airstrikes, the institute was no longer functional and could no longer deliver health services.³ These attacks occurred after years of sanctions had already left Iran's public health system in a precarious condition.⁴

In 2018, we raised concerns in *The Lancet* that US sanctions were jeopardising Iran's viral hepatitis elimination programme.⁵ This programme depends on locally developed and produced vaccines and essential imported medicines. Amid the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, Iran suffered multiple epidemic waves while sanctions constrained access to genomic surveillance facilities and other resources crucial to the Pasteur Institute's preparedness and response.⁶ The current destruction poses a fundamentally new threat: not simply disruption, but the possible loss of a cornerstone public health institution.

The Pasteur Institute of Iran has been a pillar of the country's public health system for more than a century. This institute has provided key public health infrastructure on multiple fronts, including vaccine development and production, national reference laboratory services, diagnostics, and genomic surveillance

for infectious diseases, including SARS-CoV-2, cholera, rabies, measles, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, and viral hepatitis. The loss of the institute is not merely symbolic; it represents a real, immediate, and dangerous threat to public health.^{2,6}

Reports from our Iranian collaborators indicate that, fortunately, none were physically harmed.¹ However, crucial reference laboratories, including those for genomic surveillance, rabies, HIV/AIDS, viral hepatitis, and vector-borne diseases, were completely lost.² Consequently, without these crucial facilities, seasonal and regional outbreaks might not receive timely and effective public health responses.

We urgently call on the international health communities to deploy their full capacity to protect health-care infrastructures and to foster the full restoration of the Pasteur Institute of Iran's essential laboratory and its diagnostic, surveillance, and vaccine capabilities. This is not solely a national issue; regional health security is also at risk.³

We declare no competing interests.

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