

PAHO



Pan American
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REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE AMERICAS

News release

After three years of COVID-19, surveillance and vaccination key to ending pandemic in the Americas



Dr. Jarbas Barbosa

Director of PAHO / Director de la OPS

Washington, D.C., 9 March 2023 (PAHO) – As the COVID-19 pandemic enters its third year in the Region of the Americas, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Director, Dr. Jarbas Barbosa, has called on countries to strengthen surveillance and bridge gaps in vaccination coverage to end the emergency and better prepare for future health crises.

Over the past three years, the Americas had over 190.3 million COVID-19 cases and over 2.9 million deaths, accounting for 25% and 43% of the global total respectively.

“The pandemic underscored that no country or organization in the world was fully prepared for the impact of this pandemic,” Dr. Barbosa said during a media briefing today. This includes the Americas, which is a region “marked by inequities.”

Today, incidence rates are 20-30 times lower than a year ago, but “while we are not totally out of the woods, we are in a much better place,” he added.

The PAHO Director highlighted the key role PAHO played in helping countries get to this place. This includes building and strengthening the COVID-19 Genomic Surveillance Regional Network, which is key to tracking the evolution of the virus, as well as monitoring for other pathogens with pandemic potential, including avian flu. Over the past three years, the network has facilitated the uploading of more than 580,000 sequences from Latin America and the Caribbean into global databases.

Dr. Barbosa also highlighted the role PAHO played in getting COVID-19 vaccine shots into arms “mobilizing over 160 million doses through COVAX and helping the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean roll out more than 1.3 billion vaccine doses in less than two years.”

Despite these achievements, Dr. Barbosa warned that “COVID-19 is still with us and the virus has yet to settle into a predictable pattern.”

“Throughout the last month, we have seen more than 1.5 million new cases and 17,000 deaths,” the PAHO Director said. “We cannot be complacent.”

Dr. Barbosa warned that while testing rates have dropped, it is crucial that countries maintain and continue to strengthen surveillance as the SARS-CoV-2 virus “can evolve and adapt quickly”.

Reaching the 30% of people who have yet to receive their COVID-19 primary series of COVID-19 vaccine, is also key to “preparing ourselves for any new wave of infection or new variant of concern.”

While the Region has experienced a variety of setbacks throughout the pandemic that have “revealed or exacerbated weaknesses in our health systems”, including in the detection and treatment of diseases such as TB and HIV, in the testing and treatment of non-communicable diseases; and in declining rates for routine vaccination, we now have a unique opportunity to “place health at the center of the Sustainable Development Agenda.”

“We must focus on recovering losses and on rebuilding resilient health systems that work for everyone, as well as being better prepared for future health threats,” the PAHO Director said.

“As I begin my tenure, a primary focus is to help countries of the Americas move past the COVID-19 pandemic.”

“PAHO stands ready to support our countries in the Americas, to learn from and apply the lessons we have learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Links

- [Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\) Pandemic](#)
- [COVID-19 Vaccines](#)
- [Video - Press briefing-Three years of COVID-19 in the Americas \(English audio\)](#)
- [Video - Press briefing-Three years of COVID-19 in the Americas \(Original audio\)](#)
- [Video - Press briefing-Three years of COVID-19 in the Americas\(French audio\)](#)
- [Video - Press briefing-Three years of COVID-19 in the Americas \(Portuguese audio\)](#)

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The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) works with the countries of the Americas to improve the health and quality of life of its population. Founded in 1902, it is the world's oldest international public health agency. It serves as the Regional Office of WHO for the Americas and is the specialized health agency of the Inter-American system.