

PAHO



Pan American
Health
Organization



World Health
Organization
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE
Americas

News release

With the Americas facing COVID-19 and monkeypox, prevention is key to tackling outbreaks and protecting public health, PAHO Director says.



Washington D.C., 7 September 2022 (PAHO) – With the Americas now accounting for highest numbers of monkeypox cases in the world, and COVID-19 remaining a “significant threat” to the region, prevention is key to avoiding infection and protecting peoples’ health, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Director, Dr. Carissa F. Etienne said.

Despite a decrease in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths in the Americas, “hundreds of people are still dying every day from COVID-19 across our region,” Dr Etienne said during a media briefing today.

“Yet countries have scaled back their public health measures while millions remain unvaccinated.”

While most vaccines delivered in the Americas are for boosters, 10 countries and territories have yet to fully vaccinate even 40% of their populations and some people have yet to receive a single vaccine dose.

“We must not and cannot be complacent, because this virus is still circulating, still evolving, and new variants can still emerge,” Dr. Etienne said, calling on countries to prioritize those who remain unprotected, including children who return to school this month.

Turning to the monkeypox outbreak, the PAHO Director highlighted that over 30,000 cases have been reported in the region – making the Americas the global epicenter of the pandemic.

Most cases are concentrated in the United States, Brazil, Peru and Canada, and primarily among men who have sex with men, although at least 145 cases have been reported in women and 54 among people under the age of 18.

Following a request from Member States during a special session of the PAHO Directing Council in August, PAHO secured a deal with the manufacturer of the monkeypox vaccine to make this available to countries in the region.

However, with vaccines in short supply and no effective treatment for monkeypox, Dr. Etienne urged countries to “intensify efforts to prevent the spread of the virus.”

This includes effective communication campaigns, using pragmatic, honest, targeted messages “so that everyone knows how monkeypox is spread, how to identify specific symptoms and when to seek medical attention.”

The PAHO Director also called for increasing and decentralizing testing capacity, particularly for high-risk populations, and ensuring that healthcare workers are trained to identify symptoms and provide high-quality, respectful care.

The PAHO Director also called on countries to address stigma surrounding the disease as this prevents those at risk from accessing information, getting tested, or seeking medical attention.

“Stigma has no place in public health,” she said. “If we aren’t proactive in overcoming these barriers, monkeypox will spread in silence.”

PAHO is currently working with countries to prioritize limited vaccine doses for high-risk groups and to strengthen testing. It has also developed guidance and workshops to support country

efforts to engage affected communities.

“As we saw with the global COVID-19 response, access to resources and sustained collaboration are key to stopping a virus,” Dr. Etienne said.

“An effective public health response requires us to be decisive, to act fast and prioritize support for the most vulnerable in our region.”

Links

- [Opening remarks](#)
- [COVID-19 - Weekly updates](#)
- [Monkeypox cases in the Americas](#)
- [Conferencia de prensa de la OPS sobre COVID-19 / PAHO's Press Briefing on COVID-19 - AUDIO ORIGINAL](#)
- [PAHO Press Briefing on COVID19 - AUDIO ENGLISH](#)
- [Coletiva de Imprensa OPAS - COVID-19 - AUDIO PORTUGUÊS](#)
- [Conférence de Presse COVID-19 - AUDIO FRANÇAIS](#)

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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.