



Americas at risk of further COVID-19 wave as cases surge in other regions, PAHO Director warns

Vaccination campaigns must focus on protecting the most vulnerable.



Washington D.C., 6 April (PAHO) – As cases of COVID-19 surge in Europe and East Asia due to Omicron BA.2, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Director Carissa F. Etienne has urged countries to remain vigilant and urgently close vaccination gaps.

While COVID cases and deaths have dropped across much of the region, countries have reported more than 620,000 new cases each week. And in parts of North America and the Caribbean, where Omicron is becoming the predominant variant, new infections are beginning to rise.

With Omicron BA.2 already detected in 8.7% of sequences reported from South America, “time and time again, we’ve seen how the infection dynamics in Europe are mirrored here just a few weeks later,” the Director said in a media briefing today.

“We cannot ignore the risk of further COVID-19 surges,” she added. But we now “know what it takes to protect our people.”

However, with 240 million people in the Americas yet to receive a single shot of COVID-19 vaccine, vaccination gaps “will keep our region at risk during future waves.”

While more than 685 million people in the region have completed their COVID vaccination schedules, and 50 countries and territories have already begun to deliver booster doses, we must now “redouble our efforts to ensure that our vulnerable populations receive the doses they need,” as soon as possible, Dr. Etienne said.

The PAHO Director also urged countries to keep testing capacity in place “so we do not go into this next wave blind,” and have the full picture of Omicron BA.2 in the region.

“This means making tests easily accessible for everyone everywhere, to prevent new outbreaks and to prepare our health systems if cases surge,” she added.

Dr. Etienne also warned that some countries and territories have scaled back public health measures prematurely, highlighting that data “is our eyes and ears into this pandemic.”

“Just as we did before, we must adjust our strategies when cases rise, to save lives.”

With countries due to mark World Health Day on the 7th April under the theme “Our Planet, Our Health”, the PAHO Director also highlighted the urgent need for countries to work together towards a healthier, more sustainable future.

With an increase in temperatures, air pollution and extreme weather events, “it is

undeniable that climate change has presented significant threats to our region's health," the Director said.

Health systems are also under threat as many hospitals were built in places vulnerable to floods, hurricanes, landslides, and other extreme events.

"We are working to address this throughout the Region, but we all need to move faster," added Dr. Etienne.

"Health system resilience is not just a necessity to overcome COVID, it is an investment for our future."

Links

[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](#)

MEDIA CONTACTS

Luciana Viegas: + 1 202 981-8455

Ashley Baldwin: + 1 202 340-4025

Sebastian Oliel: +1 202 316-5679

mediateam@paho.org

www.paho.org

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.