



With 14 countries yet to vaccinate 40% of people, Americas remain most unequal region in the world in fight against COVID-19

Despite hard-fought efforts and generous donor support, many vulnerable populations remain unprotected



Washington D.C., 2 February 2022 (PAHO) – While 63% of people in Latin America and the Caribbean have now been vaccinated against COVID-19, coverage remains uneven, with 14 countries and territories immunizing 70% of their populations and the same number failing to reach even 40% coverage, the Pan American Health Organization Director Carissa F. Etienne said during a media briefing today.

With 7 million new infections and over 34,000 deaths reported in the region since last week, the PAHO Director highlighted “worrisome gaps” in the vaccination of at-risk populations – with some countries reporting lower

coverage among the elderly compared to younger groups who are less at risk for severe disease.

Dr. Etienne said the full extent of the disparity remains unknown, as detailed data is limited, so it is vital that “countries collect and report data showing vaccination coverage by age, sex or by risk group.”

“These data are crucial to designing targeted vaccination campaigns, maximizing the impact of vaccine doses and saving lives,” she said.

Looking towards upcoming COVID vaccination campaigns, the director announced that vaccine supplies are expected to pick up in 2022.

Thanking donors that already “helped our region secure doses when supply was limited,” Dr. Etienne said further donations from the United States, Spain, Canada, Germany, France and other countries total some 26 million doses.

PAHO’s Revolving Fund, which has so far purchased almost 100 million doses, is also on track to obtain a further 200 million doses on behalf of the region this year.

As these doses arrive, Dr. Etienne urged countries to start making the necessary preparations for vaccine roll-out, including investing in vaccination programs, collecting and reporting detailed vaccine data, and prioritizing high-risk groups.

“Countries should refocus their efforts in protecting health workers, immunocompromised individuals and the elderly, *first*,” the Director said.

She also sent a special message to the millions of adults in the Caribbean who have yet to receive their vaccines.

“I am a medical doctor, wife, mother and grandmother. I could not wait to get my vaccination, I was so anxious for the wellbeing of myself and my 95-year-old mother,” Dr. Etienne said.

“Please don’t delay, get vaccinated today,” she urged. “COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective and they’re the best way to protect ourselves, our families, and our communities from this virus.”

Turning to the COVID-19 situation in the region, the Director reported that the

rise in infections appears to be slowing down in places hit earliest by the Omicron variant.

Most new cases were reported in North America, but surges continue across Central and South America and deaths increased by nearly one-third in all sub-regions.

In the Caribbean, deaths have more than doubled in Cuba, the Bahamas, and Antigua and Barbuda and other islands, including Martinique and Guadeloupe are seeing the virus spread rapidly among young and unvaccinated populations.

“These trends show that we must continue to sustain every part of our COVID response,” Dr. Etienne said. “Vaccinations, testing, and continuing public health measures like mask wearing and social distancing remain crucial.”

Links

[Director’s Remarks](#)

[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.