

COVID-19 continues to surge through the Americas, PAHO Director reports

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Washington, D.C., April 7, 2021 (PAHO)—"COVID infections continue to surge throughout the Americas," with more than 1.3 million new cases and 37,000 deaths reported in the region in the last week while cases rise in nearly every country in South America, Pan American Health Organization Director Carissa F. Etienne said today.

"In areas of Bolivia and Colombia, cases have doubled in the last week, and all four countries in the Southern Cone have been experiencing an acceleration in COVID-19 cases, with uninterrupted community transmission in recent weeks," Dr. Etienne said during her weekly media briefing.

Noting that more than half of all global deaths reported over the last week were found in the Americas, she said this is "a sober reminder of the human toll of this pandemic."

"Driving down infections starts by staying home and doing everything we can to protect ourselves and others from getting sick," Dr. Etienne continued. "And yet, we're seeing that populations in the region slowly and steadily increased their mobility over time, even when public health and social measures were in place during this pandemic."

If the increases in travel trends within and between countries continue, "our health systems will be in deeper trouble," she said. "Regardless of pandemic fatigue, we cannot ease public health and social interventions without good data and justification. Our actions must reflect our reality."

Dr. Etienne said the epidemiological situation across the region is uneven, with infections rising in some places and falling in others. "In North America, cases and hospitalizations are climbing in Canada, while infection rates are slowing down in the U.S. and Mexico," she noted.

She noted that over the last week, the U.S., Brazil, and Argentina were among the ten countries in the world registering the highest number of new infections worldwide, and other countries weren't far behind. "But nowhere are infections as worrisome as in South America, where cases are mounting in nearly every country," Dr. Etienne said.

World Health Day, which is celebrated today, is "a day where we reflect on the importance of health and our promise to achieve health for all," she added. "With its theme of 'together for a fairer, healthier world,' there is no better moment to talk about the need for urgent change."

"Over the last year, this virus has greatly deepened the inequities that have long divided this region," Dr. Etienne said. "While many of us have been lucky enough to continue working during the pandemic from the comfort and safety of home, half of our workforce relies on the informal economy – staying at home would have meant foregoing their livelihoods."

Many others remain or are newly unemployed. For those who are unemployed, and for the 22 million people who fell into poverty this year in the Americas, "the financial strain of this pandemic has been devastating," she said. "Effectively fighting COVID-19 is impossible without addressing some of these inequalities and supporting the most vulnerable as they struggle to protect themselves."

Noting that vaccinations continue in the Americas, she said that more than 210 million doses of COVID vaccines have been administered across 49 countries and territories in the Americas. PAHO's Revolving Fund has delivered more than 2.6 million COVID vaccines from the COVAX mechanism to 26 countries, and more doses are making their way to the Caribbean.

"But of course, vaccines are just one part of our COVID response – and we must continue to rely on public health measures to keep our populations and our countries safe," Dr. Etienne said.

While we have all been affected by this pandemic, we have not been impacted equally," Dr. Etienne said. "To fight COVID-19 effectively, we must address these inequalities and support the most vulnerable as they struggle to protect themselves."

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