

PAHO Director appeals to Caribbean people to get COVID-19 vaccine, observe protective measures

Washington, D.C., August 12, 2021 (PAHO)—Dr. Carissa F. Etienne, Director of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), expressed concern about COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy in Caribbean countries and made a strong appeal to people to get vaccinated.

Speaking at her weekly media briefing, Dr. Etienne, who is from Dominica, said, "I am truly very concerned about what is happening in the Caribbean" with people reluctant to get vaccines and relaxing their adherence to public health measures.

"So please, please, please take your vaccines and please wear your masks properly, social distance. I know the Caribbean people like to be close, and we like fetes, and we like to congregate, but please avoid congregation. Observe respiratory etiquette and wash your hands frequently."

She noted that small islands in the Caribbean have limited bed capacity in intensive care units, along with limited numbers of specialized doctors. "Our health systems will become overwhelmed very quickly," she said.

In the English-speaking Caribbean, more than 1,315,197 COVID-19 cases and more than 16,136 deaths have been reported since the beginning of the pandemic. Cases are rising in Jamaica, Martinique, the Bahamas, and Dominica. "Over the past month, infections increased 30-fold in Martinique and there has been a significant spike in hospitalizations," Dr. Etienne said in her briefing.

To date, over 1.1 million people in the Caribbean, comprising about 15% of the population have been fully vaccinated, according to PAHO figures. This does not include Haiti, which recently began its vaccination effort.

"What we are seeing now is persons totally relaxing on the public health measures and a high level of vaccine hesitancy," Dr. Etienne said. "Even when vaccines are available, persons are not coming forward. We are seeing vaccine hesitancy in healthcare workers."

"I don't know the sources of the information that is triggering this level of vaccine hesitancy. I can tell you that they are not scientifically proven, and I want to appeal to you to listen to the sources where you have truthful, scientifically based information and evidence," she added.

She reassured Caribbean citizens that the vaccines work, particularly those that received emergency use listing (EUL) from WHO. The proof, she said, "is that of the people that are now hospitalized, in severe illness and death, more than 95% of those have not been vaccinated."

"To be protected, you need to receive the full regimen," she continued. "If it is two doses, you need to receive the full doses. One dose does not protect you. And please, the best vaccine for anyone is the one available to you. So, please make use of available vaccines."

She said not getting a COVID-19 vaccine is "foolhardy" because the vaccines are safe and protect against severe illness and death.

Links

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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.