

Misinformation fueling vaccine hesitancy, PAHO Director says

"When it's your turn to get vaccinated, remember: These vaccines can save your life."

Washington, D.C. April 21, 2021 (PAHO)-- Misinformation is one of the most serious threats to public health, and it is most damaging when it fuels vaccine hesitancy, Pan American Health Organization Director Carissa F. Etienne said today.

"Every person in a vulnerable group that is hesitant to get the vaccine can become part of the sad statistics, one of the thousands of deaths that occur daily due to COVID-19. Vaccines are saving lives now and will contribute to control transmission in the near future when we achieve high immunization coverage," she told a press briefing.

Reports of very rare, unexpected side effects from some COVID-19 vaccines should not make people hesitate to get immunized, she said.

"The vaccines delivered through COVAX have been thoroughly assessed by the WHO experts. The benefits of these vaccines in preventing infections, hospitalizations, and deaths outweigh the risks of side events," Dr. Etienne noted.

"Because unreliable information spreads quickly, PAHO is collaborating with tech companies like Twitter, Google, and Facebook to address fake news and ensure the public can easily find accurate information," Dr. Etienne added.

The tragic milestone of more than three million deaths from COVID, nearly half of them in the Americas, "is a reminder that we must do more to protect each other because this virus continues to be a threat in every corner and community across our region," Etienne said. In the last week alone, the Americas reported more than 1.5 million new COVID cases and nearly 40,000 deaths.

"COVID vaccines don't provide instant protection. Our bodies take time to build up immunity to the virus after we are vaccinated, and we will not see their full impact until more of us are protected. Let us remember that with the limited doses available to us at this time, the priority should be to save lives. Stopping transmission of this disease requires additional measures," Dr. Etienne said.

The PAHO Director noted that "in Israel, COVID-19 vaccines are already helping drive down infections, and initial data from Chile and some cities in Brazil indicate a reduction in hospitalizations among the elderly, thanks in part to COVID vaccines."

"PAHO is doing everything we can to get as many vaccines to our region as possible, as quickly as possible. We have helped deliver more than 4.2 million doses of COVID vaccines to 29 countries in the Americas. Millions of additional vaccines are due in the coming weeks. And we will not stop until every country in our region has the vaccines they need," Dr. Etienne said.

But, she noted, "We need more COVID vaccines for our region. We need countries to quickly administer the doses they have on hand. We need communities to build trust in vaccines. And when it's your turn to get vaccinated, remember: These vaccines can save your life."

Vaccination Week in the Americas, which starts next week, "is a perfect time to remind us all of the power of vaccines to save lives. Vaccinations are a collective effort, and the success of immunization campaigns depends on all of us," Etienne said.

LINKS

[Director's remarks](#)

[PAHO's virtual press briefing on COVID-19](#) (Original audio)

[PAHO's virtual press briefing on COVID-19](#) (English)

[PAHO's virtual press briefing on COVID-19](#) (Portuguese)

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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.