



As COVID-19 cases rise in the Americas, countries also face the threat of seasonal flu, hurricanes, PAHO Director says

Health system preparedness is key, whether in response to COVID-19, extreme weather events or influenza.



Washington, DC, 1 June, 2022 (PAHO) – As countries of the Americas experience an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases for the sixth week running, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Director, Carissa F. Etienne, has called for additional vigilance as influenza and hurricane seasons begin.

Over the past week, countries in the region have reported a 10.4% jump in cases of COVID-19, and a 14% increase in deaths, boding a “double threat of a potential

influenza surge alongside a rise in COVID-19 cases, the Director said.

Influenza cases have been exceptionally low since COVID-19 began over two years ago, but things have started to change, the Director said during a media briefing today. "The flu virus is circulating again and not just during traditional flu season," she added.

Mexico and Peru have seen higher numbers of influenza cases than expected and Argentina, Chile and Uruguay have reported more hospitalizations than usual due to influenza.

Cases of respiratory virus in Chile, Paraguay, Brazil, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic have also spiked among young children.

While most countries have integrated COVID-19 surveillance with efforts to track the influenza virus, Dr. Etienne highlighted that they must build on that capacity "to quickly identify the different respiratory viruses circulating in the Americas."

The PAHO Director also urged people to ensure they are up to date with the flu vaccine as this reflects the strains circulating now and can provide better protection to all at risk.

Influenza vaccination campaigns are important every year but even more so this year "as we are facing multiple risks at the same time," she said.

Dr. Etienne also highlighted that while the upcoming influenza season will primarily impact those countries in the southern hemisphere, countries in Central America and the Caribbean must prepare for hurricane season.

"It only takes one massive storm to destroy people's livelihoods, cripple our health systems and lead to countless lives lost," the PAHO Director said.

And with climate change leading to a rise in the frequency and impact of extreme weather events, such as hurricanes and floods, "we must prepare early so we are not caught off guard."

While many countries already have national plans for extreme weather events, Dr. Etienne urged leaders to ensure these are up to date.

"Countries should have a detailed understanding of their risk areas, and the likely populations and health facilities which could be affected," she said.

PAHO will continue to support countries to assess risks and address vulnerabilities ahead of time. PAHO's SMART hospitals program, which focuses on the renovation of health centers in areas vulnerable to natural disasters has also been applied across the region, helping countries withstand volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, and the pandemic.

“Our wellbeing and that of our societies depend on the resilience of our health systems,” the PAHO Director said. “This is an important lesson from COVID-19 that we cannot ignore,” and one which will be addressed by Heads of State during the upcoming Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles on June 6.

The region’s health systems, which are still recovering from the disruptions brought by the pandemic, are not only facing a surge in COVID-19 cases, but are being further tested by the spike in current public health events, including Monkeypox, viral hepatitis and other respiratory infections, said Dr. Etienne.

Urgent investment in health is therefore “essential to secure everything that we hope for the future of our region: resilience and security, economic prosperity, and the wellbeing of our people,” she added.

Turning to the COVID-19 situation in the region, the Director reported that all subregions except the Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands have seen increases in both cases and deaths – with COVID-19 cases in South America rising by 43.1% and deaths by 21.3% in Central America.

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](#)

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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.