



“Too soon to lower our guard”, warns PAHO Director as pandemic reaches two-year mark

As the COVID-19 death toll surpasses 2.6 million in the Americas and restrictions lift, countries must prepare to respond quickly to new variants or outbreaks



Washington D.C., 9 March 2022 (PAHO) – As the world reaches two-years since COVID-19 was characterized as a pandemic, and public health measures are being lifted in many parts of the Americas, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Director Carissa F. Etienne warns countries that it is too soon to lower their guard.

“When places relax measures at the wrong moment, transmission spikes dangerously and we lose more lives,” Dr. Etienne said in a media briefing today, urging countries to base decisions on risk assessments and health data, and to tighten public health guidance if cases go up.

“COVID-19 is likely to be here to stay. We must learn to live with this virus, and quickly adapt to new changes,” the PAHO Director added.

Reflecting on the past two years of the pandemic, Dr. Etienne said that the Americas has been hit harder than any other region in the world, with more than 2.6 million lives lost – half of all global deaths.

“This is a tragedy of enormous proportions, and its effects will be felt for years to come,” the PAHO Director added.

She also warned that “the pandemic is still a threat today,” with countries experiencing record numbers of new infections during the Omicron wave, and the Americas accounting for 63% of new global cases in the first two months of 2022 alone. “

“We all want the pandemic to be over, but optimism alone cannot control the virus,” she said, calling for countries to keep a “finger on the pulse.”

Countries must build on lessons from the past two years to prepare for quick action and adjust public health guidance if a new variant emerges or outbreaks happen - by ensuring continued surveillance and by making testing readily available even when transmission is low.

The PAHO Director also called for countries to address the inequities that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, highlighting that in Latin America and the Caribbean, 248 million people have yet to receive a single dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, particularly those in hard to reach, rural areas and underserved communities.

“Our wins against COVID-19 show us what is possible when we work together and use the tools we know are effective,” Dr. Etienne said, referencing the advances made in the fight against COVID-19 in the past year, such as public

health measures to slow the spread, safe vaccines and better treatment options.

Turning to the COVID-19 situation in the region, the Director reported that COVID-19 cases declined by 26% across the Americas in the last week and deaths also dropped by nearly 19%.

However, possible reductions in testing mean that the number of reported cases may not accurately reflect the situation in some countries.

Despite the overall decline in cases and deaths in the region, new cases increased by 2.2% in the Caribbean. Bolivia and Puerto Rico also reported an increase in deaths over the past week.

Links

[Opening 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](#)

MEDIA CONTACTS

Luciana Viegas: + 1 202 981-8455

Ashley Baldwin: + 1 202 340-4025

Sebastian Oliel: +1 202 316-5679

mediateam@paho.org

www.paho.org

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.