

WHO warns Europe is still in danger of pandemic



Geneva, June 11 (RHC)-- The World Health Organization has urged Europeans to travel responsibly during the holiday season, as it warned that the continent was “by no means out of danger” in the battle against COVID-19.

“With increasing social gatherings, greater population mobility, and large festivals and sports tournaments taking place in the coming days and weeks, WHO Europe calls for caution,” the WHO’s European head Hans Kluge told a press briefing on Thursday.

“If you choose to travel, do it responsibly. Be conscious of the risks. Apply common sense and don’t jeopardise hard-earned gains.”

The call came despite a recent steady decline in infection rates. Over the last two months, there have been fewer new COVID-19 cases, deaths and hospitalisations, prompting 36 out of 53 countries in the region to start easing restrictions.

The number of reported COVID-19 infections last week came in at 368,000, a fifth of weekly cases reported during a peak in April this year, Kluge said. “We should all recognise the progress made across most countries in the region, we must also acknowledge that we are by no means out of danger,” he added.

Kluge said the so-called Delta variant, which was first identified in India, was a matter of concern. This variant, he said, “shows increased transmissibility and some immune escape is poised to take hold in the region while many among vulnerable populations, above the age of 60, remain unprotected”.

Countries should learn from the resurgence in cases seen over the European summer last year, even as vaccinations are being rolled out across the region, Kluge said.

“Let’s not make that mistake again,” he said, adding that with just 30 percent in the region having received their first dose of vaccines, this would not be enough to prevent another wave.

Herd immunity is typically achieved with vaccination and most scientists estimate at least 70 percent of the population must have antibodies to prevent an outbreak. But some experts have suggested that even if half the population had immunity, there might be a protective effect.

“The distance to go before reaching at least 80 percent coverage of the adult population is still considerable,” said Kluge.

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