

PAHO says more vaccine donations are urgently needed in the Americas



Washington, September 2 (RHC)-- More coronavirus vaccine donations are urgently needed in the Americas, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) says of a region that has been hard-hit by the pandemic and where three-quarters of the population has yet to be fully immunized.

During a weekly news briefing, PAHO Director Carissa Etienne said 540 million doses are required to ensure that every country in the Americas can vaccinate at least 60 percent of their population. "We must expand vaccine access in our region, especially in the places that are lagging behind," Etienne said during the virtual briefing.

“The best way to protect against variants of concern, like the Delta variant, is to ensure more people are fully vaccinated everywhere,” she said. Etienne said the pandemic has disproportionately affected the Americas, as it is home to four of the top 10 countries with the highest number of cases, and accounts for nearly a third of global deaths.

During the past week, she said over 1.6 million new coronavirus cases have been reported in the region and just under 22,000 deaths.

And although the U.S. has fully vaccinated more than half of its population, and Canada, Chile and Uruguay more than 60 percent – these nations are the exception and much of the Americas region lags behind, Etienne said.

“While every country in our region has begun administering COVID-19 vaccines, immunisations are following the fault lines of inequality that have long divided our region,” she said.

Etienne added that more than a third of countries in the region have yet to vaccinate 20 percent of their populations. The situation is even more dire in Central American countries like Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, where vaccination rates remain in the single digits.

The United States, Russia and China as well as other nations have shipped vaccine doses to countries in the region. Many doses have also come through the vaccine sharing mechanism COVAX.

A Gallup poll published on Wednesday showed that 68 percent of adults in the US said the COVID-19 situation in the country is getting worse, while 15 percent said it is getting better. The findings showed a stark reversal from back in June when 89 percent said the situation was getting better and 3 percent said it was getting worse. Last month, 45 percent of Americans said the situation was improving.

While cases are on the decline in South America, infection rates are increasing in several Central American countries, especially Costa Rica and Belize, Etienne said. In the Caribbean, Jamaica is registering its highest ever death toll from the virus, and its hospitals have reached full capacity.

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