

# *New cases of COVID-19 decline by 19% worldwide, deaths stabilize*

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**WHO says just over 16 million new COVID-19 infections and about 75,000 deaths were reported worldwide last week.**

Geneva, February 17 (RHC)-- The number of new COVID-19 cases worldwide has dropped by 19 percent in the past week, while recorded deaths remain stable, according to the World Health Organization's (WHO) latest report on the coronavirus pandemic.

The United Nations' health agency said late on Tuesday that "just over 16 million new cases and just under 75,000 new deaths were reported" globally during the week of February 7 to February 13.

The Western Pacific was the only region to report an increase in new weekly cases, a rise of about 19 percent. Southeast Asia recorded a drop of about 37 percent, the biggest decrease across the six WHO regions.

The biggest number of new COVID-19 cases was seen in Russia. Cases there and elsewhere in Eastern Europe doubled in recent weeks, driven by a surge of the hugely infectious Omicron variant.

Meanwhile, the number of deaths rose by 38 percent in the Eastern Mediterranean region and by about one-third in the Western Pacific, according to the WHO's weekly report. The WHO said that all other coronavirus variants, including Alpha, Beta and Delta, continue to decline globally as Omicron crowds them out.

Among the more than 400,000 COVID-19 virus sequences uploaded to the world's biggest virus database in the last week, more than 98 percent were Omicron. The world health agency said the BA.2 version of Omicron appears to be "steadily increasing" and its prevalence has risen in South Africa, Denmark, the UK and other countries.

Health officials have noted, however, that Omicron causes milder disease than previous COVID-19 variants and in countries with high vaccination rates, hospitalisation and death rates have not increased substantially, even with Omicron's spread.

WHO's Africa director, Dr Matshidiso Moeti, said last week there was "light at the end of the tunnel" for the continent and that even despite low vaccination rates, Africa was transitioning from the acute pandemic phase of COVID-19.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom has said repeatedly that the pandemic is not over and it is premature for countries to think that the end might be imminent. "Our expectation is that the acute phase of this pandemic will end this year, of course with one condition, the 70 percent vaccination [target is achieved] by mid this year around June, July," he told reporters in South Africa last week.

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