

# *Risk of long COVID in the Americas as positive cases increase*

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Washington, July 1 (RHC)-- Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Director Carissa F. Etienne has warned all the countries of the Americas region to prepare their health systems for the treatment and monitoring of post-COVID conditions, as infections have increased by 13.9 percent in the region from last week.

Data suggest that at least 10 to 20 percent of people who COVID-19 has infected are at-risk and experience symptoms, including persistent and severe fatigue, shortness of breath and mental health issues. So far, the confirmed cases reported by the Americas over the past two years account for more than 161 million COVID-19 cases.

“The pandemic has surprised us time and time again, and many of its effects will linger for years to come,” said Etienne during a media briefing on Wednesday. She emphasized that those suffering symptoms are at risk of the post-COVID condition, as well as those who smoke and vape and those who have not been vaccinated.

“The best way to avoid post-COVID condition is by not getting COVID,” the PAHO director said. She added that masking and social distancing are still key measures, especially in areas of high transmission.

“But 224 million people have not yet received a single shot of vaccine in our region,” she said, referencing studies showing that those who contract COVID-19 after vaccination have milder symptoms and are less likely to develop the post-COVID condition. “We need to pick up the pace of vaccination to shield populations from the worst consequences of this virus.”

Etienne made a call for improving the response mechanisms at health systems for patients with the post-COVID condition, urging them to “acknowledge this long-lasting effect of the pandemic and help address it.”

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