

2022 can mark the end of COVID's acute stage

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The UN health agency chief expressed optimism during a press briefing that 2022 maybe the year the world ends the acute stage of the COVID-19 pandemic.?

World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Ghebreyesus reminded that it was two years ago, as people gathered for New Year's Eve celebrations, that a new global threat emerged. Since then, 1.8 million deaths were recorded in 2020 and 3.5 million in 2021, but the actual number is much higher. There are also millions of people dealing with long-term consequences from the virus.?

Right now, Delta and Omicron are driving up cases to record numbers, leading to spikes in hospitalizations and deaths. Tedros is "highly concerned" that the more transmissible Omicron, circulating at the same time as Delta, is leading to "a tsunami of cases."

Earlier in the year, during meetings of the world's biggest economies – the G7 and G20 – WHO challenged leaders to vaccinate 40 per cent of their populations by the end of 2021 and 70 per cent by the

middle of 2022. During 2021, 92 out of 194 Member States missed the target.

Tedros attributed this to low-income countries receiving a limited supply for most of the year and then subsequent vaccines arriving close to expiry, without key parts, like syringes. “Forty per cent was doable. It’s not only a moral shame, it cost lives and provided the virus with opportunities to circulate unchecked and mutate”, he said.

The WHO chief warned that boosters in rich countries could cause low-income countries to again fall short and called on leaders of wealthy countries and manufacturers to work together to reach the 70 per cent goal by July. “This is the time to rise above short-term nationalism and protect populations and economies against future variants by ending global vaccine inequity”, he said.

“We have 185 days to the finish line of achieving 70 per cent by the start of July 2022. And the clock starts now.”

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