

COVID-19 keeps the world in suspense

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By María Josefina Arce.

COVID 19 kept the world in check during the last two years; it led to the collapse of health systems, paralyzed economic activities and increased existing inequalities. Now, with its high infection rate, Omicron, the new variant first detected late last November in South Africa, is raising new doubts about the much-needed global recovery.

The strain is advancing rapidly and the number of infected people is growing by the day. It is already present in a large part of the world and in some countries, such as the United States, it has set records for the number of patients.

According to the Johns Hopkins University, on the third day, more than one million cases were counted in the United States.

Although studies assure that the symptoms are more bearable and it seems to be less lethal, the high transmission of Omicron creates new challenges for hospital centers and exhausted health personnel, after battling for 24 months against the disease caused by the new coronavirus.

But the alarm bells are still ringing. French scientists said that a new variant has been detected in the south of France, with 46 mutations that showed an atypical combination. Patient zero is believed to be a person who returned to the country from Cameroon.

In addition, cases of Flurona, a combination of influenza and COVID 19, are also beginning to be reported. After the first case reported this year in Israel, others have already been reported in Spain and Hungary, including Brazil, the first country in Latin America to report this type of double infection.

Epidemiologist Abdi Mahamud, head of the Office of Incident Management at WHO, the World Health Organization, pointed out that vaccines continue to show efficacy in preventing urgent hospitalization and deaths from COVID 19.

And that is a key point, as vaccination has not kept pace for everyone. From the outset, the richer states have monopolized the immunos to the detriment of the less developed ones.

Moreover, the COVAX mechanism, created precisely to enable greater access to vaccines for the poorest, has not worked as expected. While in the presence of Omicron, the rich nations apply a booster dose, in the less developed ones, a large part of the population still does not have the complete vaccination schedule.

The reality is that in many cases the immunizations have been received late or at short notice, and sometimes drugs with a very short expiration date had to be returned or discarded when governments could not distribute them in time.

COVID 19 is keeping the world on tenterhooks, which in the last two years has seen many aspects of the world go backwards. Poverty, hunger, unemployment and gender-based violence have increased, while the gap between rich and poor has deepened, not only internationally, but also within borders.

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