

# *PAHO Director calls for protection of health workers in face of the advancing COVID19 pandemic in the region of the Americas*

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Warning that cases of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) have doubled in a week in the Region of the Americas, Pan American Health Organization Director Carissa F. Etienne has urged countries to take measures that protect health care workers to ensure they have access to the personal protective equipment and supplies they need to care for patients affected by the disease.

“Shortages of the most basic protective equipment leave doctors, nurses and other frontline workers dangerously vulnerable as they care for COVID-19 patients,” Dr. Etienne said in a press briefing Tuesday.

Through April 6, 384,435 confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been reported in the Americas, and 11,270 people have lost their lives. “In just seven days, we witnessed cases and deaths more than double in our region. The pandemic is accelerating rapidly, and I urge governments to prepare and respond at the same speed,” she said.

Etienne urged countries to follow PAHO guidelines and recommendations including social distancing measures to lessen the burden on health systems. “All of us need to be prepared for more difficult weeks ahead,” she said.

The PAHO Director said, “A pandemic like COVID-19 would overwhelm any health system, but its impact on those without sufficient health workers will be devastating.”

“Limited supplies of gloves, medical masks, respirators, goggles and gowns can lead to a wave of preventable infections among health workers,” she said.

“Countries must work together to ensure that supply chains are able to deliver protective equipment to the hospitals and health centers who need it most. Solidarity and coordination among countries will be essential to ensure we make the most of the limited supplies available.”

Dr. Carissa F. Etienne

Noting that April 7 is World Health Day, Etienne said this is “a time to acknowledge and celebrate doctors, nurses, midwives and the many other people working to keep our communities healthy. Our health workers deserve our recognition, our praise and our gratitude. Above all, they deserve to be able to protect themselves while they do their jobs.”

“Now is not the time to hoard and stockpile. It is a time for easing export restrictions and embracing flexible regulations that enable access in the places that will be hardest hit in the next few weeks. Governments and the private sector should also seek innovative solutions to boost production and repurpose industrial capacity to expand supplies,” she said.

“We must also care for our health workers through support networks that allow them to preserve their mental and physical health. We must celebrate them for the heroes they are and protect them from stigma. We should encourage and admire our health workers, not fear and disrespect them.”

Dr. Carissa F. Etienne

Source: [www.paho.org](http://www.paho.org)

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