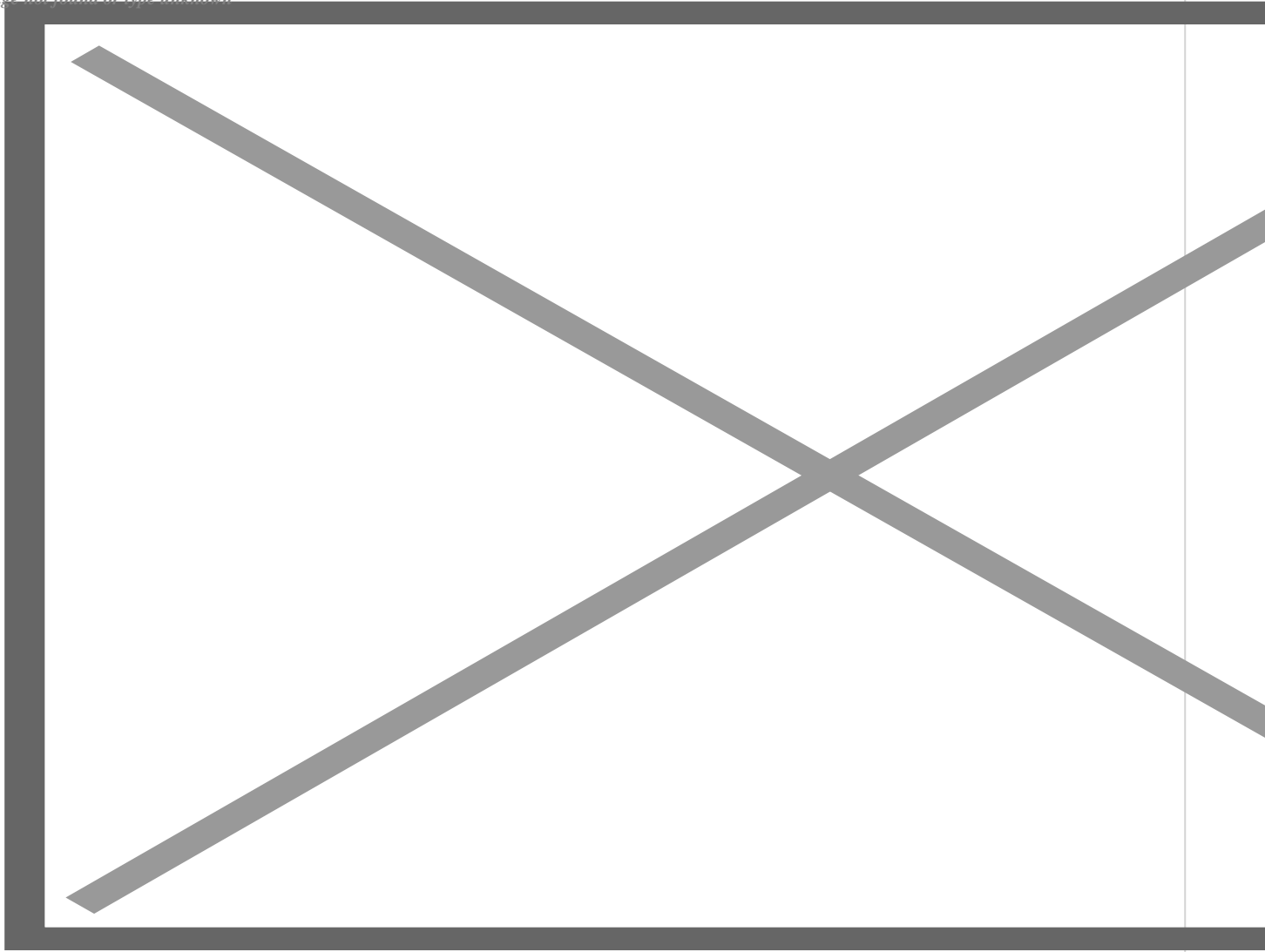


WHO warns of tough times ahead for Europe with COVID-19

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Women with anti-coronavirus masks pass by a hospital in Warsaw, Poland. (Photo: AP)

Geneva, November 6 (RHC)-- The World Health Organization (WHO) in Europe says there is an “explosion” of COVID-19 cases in the continent, warning of a “tough time” ahead.

“We do see an explosion.... in the sense, it only takes a couple of days to have over the European region an increase of one million cases,” said WHO’s European regional director Hans Kluge in an interview with AFP on Thursday.

The mortality rate in the region could be rising “little by little”, added the official, while he was wearing a protective face mask even as he was interviewed over a webcam meeting. “It’s going to be a little bit of a tough time, we need to be honest on that,” Kluge further said.

Although the COVID-19 cases rapidly rise, the WHO official cautioned that closing schools should be seen as a last resort, arguing that there are “no reasons to say that schools are a main driver of the transmission.”

“We need to keep the schools open really until last because we cannot afford a COVID-19 lost generation,” Kluge noted. However, he stressed that the “status quo is not an option”, calling for proportionate targeted measures, which could be scaled up.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Kluge emphasized that the European governments should take two things into consideration. “Coherence, so people see that we don’t flip-flop, and... predictability, so people know if this threshold is being reached, this is what is going to happen.”

He also urged all Europeans to wear face masks, stressing that with the widespread use of face masks and tight control of social gatherings “we can save 266,000 lives by February in the whole European region.”

The WHO Europe, which spans 53 countries, including Russia and countries in the Central Asia, reported earlier on Thursday that a total of more than 12 million people in the region contracted COVID-19, with some two million in the last seven days.

On October 29, Kluge had expressed deep concerns about the record-setting rate of coronavirus infections in Europe after the region had recorded once again the highest-ever weekly incidence of cases.

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