

WHO says nations ordering booster shots while others need first jabs

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Tedros said they should instead direct their doses to COVAX, the vaccine-sharing programme mainly for middle-income and poorer countries [Laurent Gillieron /Pool/Reuters]

Geneva, July 13 (RHC)-- Countries should not be ordering booster shots for their vaccinated populations while other countries have yet to receive COVID-19 vaccines, the World Health Organization said on

Monday.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said deaths were again rising from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Delta variant was becoming dominant, and many countries had yet to receive enough vaccine doses to protect their health workers.

“The global gap in COVID-19 vaccine supply is hugely uneven and inequitable. Some countries and regions are actually ordering millions of booster doses, before other countries have had supplies to vaccinate their health workers and most vulnerable,” said Tedros.

He singled out vaccine makers Pfizer and Moderna as companies that were aiming to provide booster shots in countries where there were already high levels of vaccination. Dr. Tedros said they should instead direct their doses to COVAX, the vaccine-sharing program mainly for middle-income and poorer countries.

“The priority now must be to vaccinate those who have received no doses and protection,” the WHO chief said. “I ask you, who would put firefighters on the frontline without protection? Who are most the vulnerable to the flames of the COVID-19 pandemic? The health workers on the frontlines, older persons and the vulnerable.”

Meanwhile, the WHO’s chief scientist, Soumya Swaminathan, said the global health body had so far not seen evidence showing that booster shots were necessary for those who have received a full course of vaccines. While boosters may be necessary one day, there was no evidence they were needed yet.

“It has to be based on the science and the data, not on individual companies declaring that their vaccines need to be administered as a booster dose,” she said.

Mike Ryan, head of the WHO’s emergencies program, said: “We will look back in anger, and we will look back in shame” if countries use precious doses on booster shots, at a time when vulnerable people are still dying without vaccines elsewhere.

“These are people who want to have their cake and eat it, and then they want to make some more cake and eat it too,” he said.

Pfizer said it plans to meet with top United States health officials on Monday to discuss the drugmaker’s request for federal authorisation of a third dose of its COVID-19 vaccine. Pfizer has asserted that booster shots would be needed within 12 months.

President Joe Biden’s chief medical adviser Anthony Fauci has acknowledged “it is entirely conceivable, maybe likely” that booster shots will be needed. On Sunday, Fauci did not rule out the possibility but said it was too soon for the government to recommend another shot.

He said the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the FDA did the right thing last week by pushing back against Pfizer’s assertion with their statement that they did not view booster shots as necessary “at this time.”

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