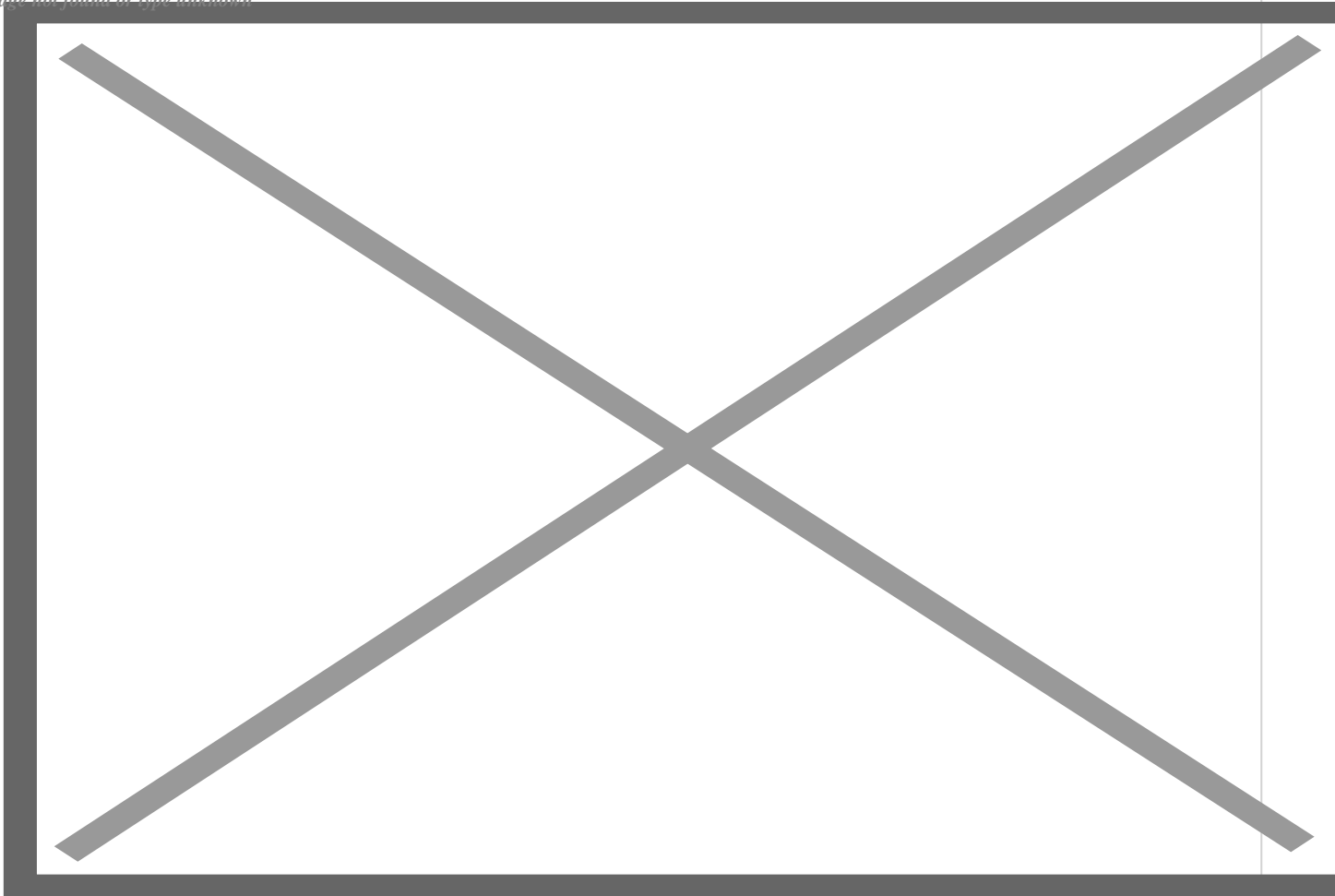


PAHO calls for more vaccination donations

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PAHO Director Carissa Etienne reiterated a call for countries with enough doses to distribute them as quickly as possible to needy countries. [Ricardo Arduengo/Reuters]

Washington, July 22 (RHC)-- Coronavirus infections are increasing across much of Central America and on smaller Caribbean islands, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) said on Wednesday, as it repeated a call for more vaccine donations to help hard-hit nations.

PAHO Director Carissa Etienne said while Uruguay, Chile and Argentina – nations that have made considerable headway in their vaccination campaigns – are reporting steep declines in new infections,

cases and deaths are spiking in Honduras and Guatemala.

The Amazonian regions of Colombia and Peru also remain COVID-19 hotspots, she said. “We face a pandemic of the unvaccinated and the only way to stop it is to expand vaccination,” Etienne said during a weekly briefing. “Vaccines are critical, even if no vaccine is 100 percent effective.”

Just 15 percent of people in Latin America and the Caribbean have been fully vaccinated, she said, adding that the figure obscures the fact that some countries including Honduras and Haiti have yet to reach even 1 percent inoculation.

Etienne reiterated a call for countries with enough doses to distribute them as quickly as possible to needy countries. “We clearly need more vaccines and we need them now,” she said. “At this time vaccine donations are really the only way for many countries in our region to secure the doses that they need quickly. “Please don’t wait until you have surplus doses. You need to share out of what you have now.”

The COVAX mechanism will send 3.7 million more vaccine doses to countries in the Americas region through the end of July, said PAHO Assistant Director Jarbas Barbosa. PAHO is working closely with the United States to overcome logistical challenges for delivery of donations, he added.

On Tuesday, three million doses of the Moderna coronavirus vaccine donated by the U.S. arrived in Guatemala, bringing to 4.5 million the number of doses the US has sent the Central American nation.

The Americas reported 967,000 new cases and 22,000 deaths last week, Etienne said, a slight weekly decrease. “These trends illustrate how COVID-19 remains entrenched within our region, particularly in countries with no vaccination coverage,” Etienne said. “And the spread of variants only make matters worse.”

In the US, meanwhile, there is concern over persistent vaccine hesitancy in some parts of the country, as well as fears over breakthrough cases among vaccinated people. Just more than 68 percent of adults in the US have received at least one jab. But several states have reached the 40 percent or more mark. The state of Mississippi ranks last with only 37.7 percent of adults having received at least one dose.

Officials blame misinformation on social media and in recent weeks have stepped up efforts to address the issue. On Tuesday, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said a fully vaccinated White House official tested positive for COVID-19 off-site and had mild symptoms.

She said the official remains off White House grounds pending additional testing for confirmation. The White House medical unit had conducted contact tracing and interviews, finding no close contact among staff and President Joe Biden.

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