

# *Worldwide COVID-19 cases breach 250 million mark*

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Brussels, November 9 (RHC)-- Worldwide COVID-19 cases breached the 250 million mark on Monday as many countries have eased trade and tourism related restrictions, even though eastern Europe continues to grapple with record outbreaks.

The daily average of COVID-19 infections has seen dropped by 36 percent over the last three months but the highly transmittable Delta variant of coronavirus is spreading exponentially, infecting approximately 50 million people every 90 days.

At the time of its outbreak, it took one year for the disease to spread and reach the first 50 million across the globe. However, the new variants have fueled rapid spread of the cataclysmic virus.

Notwithstanding the steady rise in COVID-19 cases, experts believe the worst of the pandemic is over after the global rollout of vaccines and the gradual acquirement of herd immunity.

"We think between now and the end of 2022, this is the point where we get control over this virus ... where we can significantly reduce severe disease and death," World Health Organization (WHO) epidemiologist, Maria Van Kerkhove, told Reuters.

The world health body's top specialist has warned that the vaccine inequity is "prolonging" the pandemic. "We have enough vaccines that, if they were distributed appropriately, can protect those who are most at risk for severe disease and our front-line workers... Without appropriate vaccination, we will continue to see outbreaks among those who are under protected, which will continue to overwhelm our health systems... Too many vaccines are going wasted [and] too many vaccines are not being used most appropriately epidemiologically, economically, ethically; and frankly, this inappropriate use of the vaccine right now is prolonging the pandemic," Kerkhove asserted.

She expressed concern about the fact that wealthy nations were now delivering COVID-19 boosters while many people in developing countries were yet to receive their first dose.

Meanwhile, Russia, Ukraine and Greece reported record, or near record, levels of new infections since the pandemic's outbreak in 2019, according to the Reuters analysis. More than half of all new infections reported worldwide are from countries in Europe, with a million new infections about every four days, according to the analysis.

More than 50 percent of world's population has yet to receive a single dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, according to Our World in Data, an online scientific publication.

Improving vaccine distribution will be on the agenda of meetings of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), to be hosted virtually by New Zealand's premier this week. APEC nations including Russia, China and the United States had promised in June to expand sharing and manufacturing of COVID-19 vaccines and lift trade bans, easing medicines exports to countries in need.

"Together we are continuing to keep supply chains functioning and are supporting trade in critical medical supplies - including testing kits, PPE and now vaccines," New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said on Monday.

The WHO and other global organizations last month appealed to world leaders at the G-20 summit to provide a \$23.4 billion fund to bring COVID-19 vaccines, tests, and medicines to poorer countries in the next 12 months.

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