

WHO chief says end of the COVID-19 pandemic is in sight



Tedros Adhanom, Director-General of the World Health Organization said the world has 'never been in a better position to end the pandemic' [File: Denis Balibouse/Reuters]

Geneva, September 15 (RHC)-- The number of newly reported cases of COVID-19 has dropped dramatically, the head of the World Health Organization has said, urging nations to keep up their efforts against the disease that has killed more than six million people.

“We have never been in a better position to end the pandemic,” WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters at a virtual news conference. Newly reported cases of the disease, which has killed millions and infected 606 million since appearing in late 2019, last week fell to the lowest level since March 2020, Tedros said. “If we don’t take this opportunity now, we run the risk of more variants, more deaths, more disruption, and more uncertainty.”

In a bid to help countries to do what is needed to rein in the virus, the WHO published six policy briefs. “These policy briefs are an urgent call for governments to take a hard look at their policies, and strengthen them for COVID-19 and future pathogens with pandemic potential,” Tedros said. He also urged nations to vaccinate 100 percent of their high-risk groups and keep testing for the virus.

The rollout of vaccines and therapies has helped to stem the severity of the disease. The WHO warned of the possibility of future waves of the virus and said countries need to maintain adequate supplies of medical equipment and healthcare workers.

“We expect there to be future waves of infections, potentially at different time points throughout the world caused by different subvariants of Omicron or even different variants of concern,” said WHO’s senior epidemiologist Maria Van Kerkhove. Monkeypox cases, too, were on a downtrend but Tedros urged countries to keep up the fight. WHO officials said last month that it is possible to eliminate the Monkeypox outbreak in Europe by stepping up vaccination and testing. “As with COVID-19, this is not the time to relax or let down our guard.”

Last week, the UN Development Program (UNDP) said that, for the first time in its history, the Human Development Index (HDI) has declined for two straight years amid crises such as COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine. The HDI is a measure of countries’ life expectancies, education levels and standards of living.

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