

WHO says COVID-19 no longer a global health emergency



A medical worker administers a nasal swab to a patient at a coronavirus disease (COVID-19) testing centre in Nantes, near Nantes, France

The WHO says that even though the emergency phase of the COVID-19 pandemic is over, it has not yet come to an end [File: Stephane Mahe/Reuters]

Geneva, May 5 (RHC)-- COVID-19 no longer qualifies as a “global health emergency”, the World Health Organization (WHO) says. The announcement on Friday came more than three years after the United

Nations health agency declared its highest level of alert over the devastating virus, which triggered lockdowns, upended economies and killed millions of people worldwide.

“Yesterday, the Emergency Committee met for the 15th time and recommended to me that I declare an end to the public health emergency of international concern,” WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said. “I’ve accepted that advice. It’s, therefore, with great hope that I declare COVID-19 over as a global health emergency.”

The WHO said that even though the emergency phase was over, the pandemic declared in March 2020 has not come to an end, noting recent spikes in cases in Southeast Asia and the Middle East. The agency said thousands of people are still dying from the coronavirus every week. “That does not mean COVID-19 is over as a global health threat,” Tedros said, adding he would not hesitate to reconvene experts to reassess the situation should the coronavirus “put our world in peril”.

Tedros said the pandemic had been on a downward trend for more than a year, acknowledging that most countries have already returned to how life was before COVID-19 emerged. He bemoaned the damage that COVID-19 had done to the global community, saying the disease had shattered businesses and plunged millions of people into poverty.

Tedros also noted that there were likely at least 20 million COVID-19 deaths, far more than the officially reported 7 million. “COVID has changed our world, and it has changed us,” he said, warning that the risk of new variants still remains.

When the WHO first declared the coronavirus to be a public health emergency of international concern on January 30, 2020, it had not yet been named COVID-19, and there were no major outbreaks beyond China. More than three years later, the virus has caused an estimated 764 million cases globally and about 5 billion people have received at least one dose of a vaccine.

The WHO’s highest level of alert helps focus international attention on a health threat and bolsters collaboration on vaccines and treatments.

Lifting it is a sign of the progress the world has made in these areas and could mean that international collaboration or funding efforts are also brought to an end or shift in focus, although many have already adapted as the pandemic has receded in different regions.

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