

World Health Organization says ten percent of world's population may have had COVID-19

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Geneva, October 6 (RHC)-- The World Health Organization (WHO) has said hundreds of millions of people may have already been infected with the new coronavirus, far more than the current tally of more than 35 million.

“Our current best estimates tell us that about 10 percent of the global population may have been infected by this virus,” Mike Ryan, the WHO’s emergency operations chief, told the global health agency’s executive board on Monday.

“This varies depending on the country. It varies from urban to rural. It varies between different groups,” Ryan said in Geneva. “But what it does mean is that the vast majority of the world remains at risk.”

Ryan said COVID-19 cases and deaths were surging across Europe, Southeast Asia and the eastern Mediterranean, while the situation in Africa and the Western Pacific “is currently rather more positive.”

He added the pandemic will “continue to evolve” but said the world had the tools to help suppress transmission of the coronavirus and save lives. “The future depends on the choices we collectively make about how we use those tools, develop, scale up and distribute others,” he added.

According to a tally by Johns Hopkins University, there have been some 35.2 million coronavirus cases confirmed so far, with more than one million deaths. Confirmed recoveries stand at 24.5 million.

At the meeting, the United States made a thinly veiled swipe at China for what it called a “failure” to provide accurate and timely information on the outbreak.

But Zhang Yang of China’s National Health Commission, said: “China has always been transparent and responsible to fulfill our international obligations.” Beijing maintained close contacts with all levels of the UN health agency, she added.

The WHO and other experts have said the new coronavirus, believed to have emerged in a food market in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year, is of animal origin.

The WHO has submitted a list of experts to take part in an international mission to China to investigate the origin of the virus, for consideration by Chinese authorities, Ryan said, without giving details.

The U.S. assistant health secretary, Brett Giroir, said it was critical the WHO’s 194 member states receive “regular and timely updates, including the terms of reference for this panel or for any field missions so that we can all engage with the process and be confident in the outcomes.”

Germany, speaking for the European Union, said the expert mission should be deployed soon, with Australia also supporting a swift investigation.

Meanwhile, Alexandra Dronova, Russia’s deputy health minister, called for an evaluation of the legal and financial repercussions of the Trump administration announcing the US withdrawal from the WHO next July.

The U.S. will not pay some \$80 million it owes the WHO and will instead redirect the money to help pay its UN bill in New York, a U.S. official said last month.

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