

World Health Organization affirms countries on very 'dangerous track' in COVID-19 pandemic

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Geneva, October 24 (RHC)-- The Northern Hemisphere is facing a crucial moment in fighting the coronavirus pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) has said, with too many countries witnessing an exponential increase in coronavirus cases.

The stark warning came as the number of coronavirus cases more than doubled in 10 days across Europe, with several southern European countries reporting their highest daily case numbers this week.

Meanwhile, the United States recorded its biggest one-day rise in infections – more than 70,000 – since July on Thursday amid concerns of a “third wave” of COVID-19 gripping the worst-affected country in the world.

“We are at a critical juncture in the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the Northern Hemisphere,” WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a news conference. “The next few months are going to be very tough and some countries are on a dangerous track.”

The novel coronavirus has infected nearly 42 million people and killed at least 1.1 million since the outbreak emerged last December, according to data collected by Johns Hopkins University. Following months-long lockdowns and border closures, countries have gradually eased restrictions and reopened businesses to salvage economies crippled by the pandemic.

The WHO has warned the co-circulation of the annual flu season in winter months and COVID-19 – both of which cause respiratory illness – could place an additional burden on vulnerable populations and healthcare systems that are already stretched because of the pandemic.

Tedros said too many countries were now seeing an exponential increase in infections, “and that is now leading to hospitals and intensive care units running close or above capacity – and we’re still only in October.” “We urge leaders to take immediate action to prevent further unnecessary deaths, essential health services from collapsing, and schools shutting again. As I said it in February and I’m repeating it today: This is not a drill.”

Improving testing, tracing contacts of those infected, and isolation of those at risk of spreading the virus would enable countries to avoid mandatory lockdowns, he added.

Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO’s COVID-19 technical lead, said the situation was “very worrying” in Europe, which clocked up more than half the new cases registered in the world over the last 24 hours.

“We’re not only seeing increases in case numbers in many cities across Europe; the capacity for ICU [intensive care units] is going to be reached in the coming weeks,” she said.

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