

WHO calls for intensified measures over 'alarming' virus variant



Geneva, January 8 (RHC)-- The World Health Organization's European branch on Thursday said more needed to be done to deal with the alarming situation brought on by a recently discovered variant of the novel coronavirus.

Speaking at a press conference, the WHO's regional director for Europe Hans Kluge called the current situation "a tipping-point in the course of the pandemic," as Europe was both challenged by surging cases and new strains of the virus causing Covid-19.

"This is an alarming situation, which means that for a short period of time we need to do more than we have done and to intensify the public health and social measures to be certain we can flatten the steep vertical line in some countries," Kluge said, referring primarily to the new variant first discovered in the

UK.

While it is natural for viruses to change over time and the variant is not believed to cause more severe symptoms, its "increased transmissibility," means it still raises concern, according to WHO Europe.

"Without increased control to slow its spread, there will be an increased impact on already stressed and pressurized health facilities," Kluge said.

The measures proposed by Kluge were those "with which we are all familiar," listing the adherence to generalized mask wearing, limiting social gatherings, maintaining physical distance and hand washing as prudent but in need of being intensified.

These measures coupled with adequate testing, quarantine and isolation, and vaccination "will work if we all get involved," Kluge said.

The WHO's European Region comprises 53 countries and includes Russia and several countries in Central Asia, and 22 countries in the region have recorded cases of the new variant. According to the organization's estimates, the new strain could replace others across the region.

Europe has been hard hit by the COVID pandemic, with more than 27.6 million cases and 603,000 deaths, according to WHO's monitoring. WHO Europe also estimates that excess mortality in 2020 was five times that of 2019 and three times that of 2018.

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