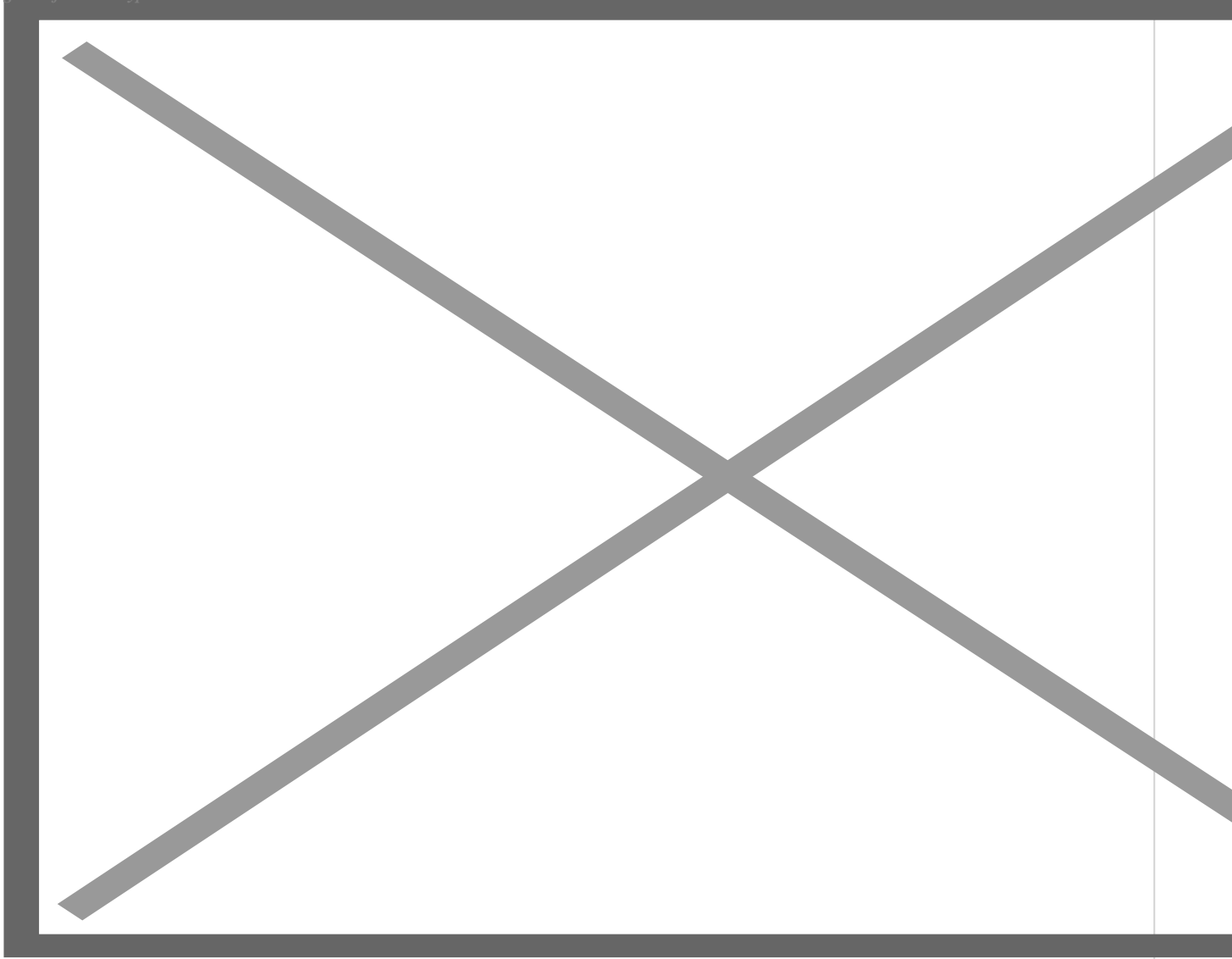


Alarming rise in COVID cases despite vaccination efforts in Chile

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Chile receives nearly four million doses of China's Sinovac vaccine in February. (Photo: AFP)

Santiago de Chile, March 17 (RHC)-- Chile has been battling the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, which has turned out to be far more aggressive than the first one, despite the Latin American nation vaccinating more than one-third of its population.

More than 5,000 new infections have been reported on average daily in the past seven days, with the Metropolitan region, where the capital city of Santiago is located, accounting for 44 percent of all cases in the country. More than 21,000 people have died and more than 900,000 people have been infected by the virus that has killed 2.6 million people worldwide.

Dr Sebastian Ugarte, who runs the intensive care unit in Santiago's Indisa clinic, said that every bed is occupied at his facility, even though the number of critical care units nearly doubled this week. "People over 70, most of whom have already been vaccinated, have almost disappeared from our emergency rooms," Ugarte told reporters. "Now, we have younger patients, but some gravely ill."

The country has carried out one of the most aggressive vaccination campaigns in the world since early February, having set itself the target of inoculating approximately five million citizens against the disease by the end of March.

Chile, which started targeted inoculations late last year for front-line health workers, has been rolling vaccines out to older adults and essential workers after receiving nearly four million doses of China's Sinovac vaccine in February.

Today, more than 33 percent of the more 18 million Chileans has one or both jobs, which makes the country one of the world leaders in terms of the percentage of people who have received vaccines. Still, Chileans queue up from early hours every day to get vaccinated.

Health officials warn that vaccinations will not make much difference to the big picture right away, since 80 percent of Chileans must be fully vaccinated in order for herd immunity to be effective, and that is not predicted to happen for another three months.

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