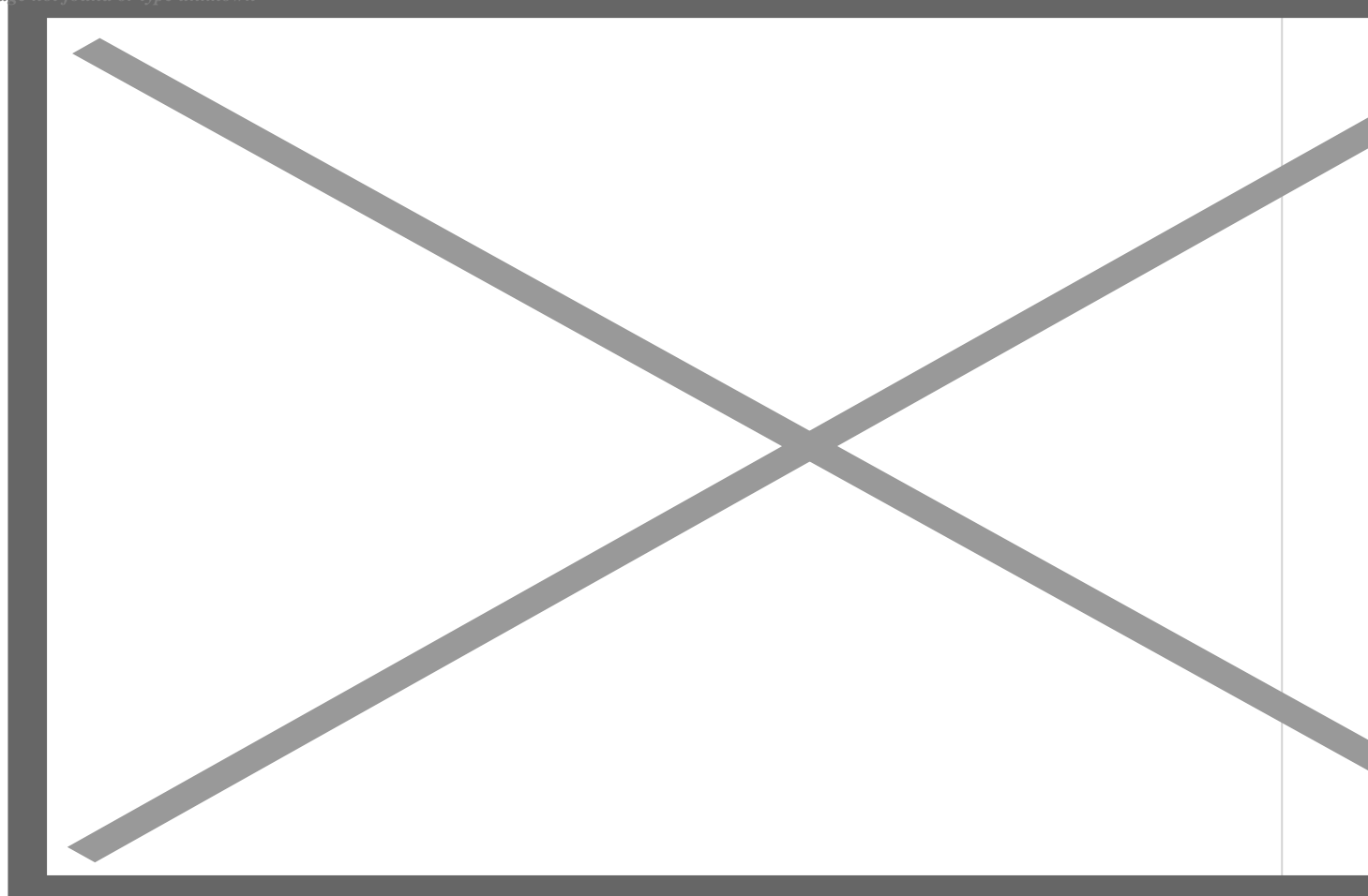


WHO warns COVID-19 variants are stronger and faster

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WHO's Health Emergencies Program Director, Mike Ryan

Geneva, April 1 (RHC)-- Global COVID-19 deaths and cases have continued to rise, the World Health Organization has said as health chiefs warn of the threat of stronger variants and the growing number of young people in intensive care with the virus.

"It's a watershed moment in the pandemic," the director of the WHO's health emergencies program, Mike Ryan, said during a televised news briefing on Wednesday. "At the very moment that we need to stay the course with [health measures], we're seeing the numbers starting to rise and governments going back to restrictive measures."

His comments come as the number of global deaths increased for the second consecutive week, while new cases rose for the sixth week in a row.

Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO's technical lead on the pandemic, said the "worrying trend" on infections shown by the data is becoming "very, very serious." The latest WHO statistics for the week up to March 28 show a 14% increase in global COVID-19 transmission, while in Southeast Asia the figure is 46% and in the Western Pacific it is 32%.

WHO says Sinopharm and Sinovac COVID-19 vaccines have efficacy levels compatible with its requirements

Ryan said the emergence of "stronger and faster" variants has facilitated the easier transmission of the virus, and some are more resistant to vaccines.

Dr. Ryan also noted a "worrying shift" in the age profile of Covid-19 patients in intensive care beds in many countries, with a growing number of people aged 30 to 60 becoming critically ill with the virus.

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