

COVID vaccine scarcity and fake doses hamper efforts in the Americas

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Mexico City, April 22 (RHC)-- Amid a scramble to secure enough coronavirus vaccines in the Americas, there are reports of fake doses proliferating on the black market in several countries in the region, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) said on Wednesday.

“We have received some information from Mexico, Argentina and Brazil that some doses have been offered through social media, illegal markets offering vaccines that probably are falsified,” Jarbas Barbosa, assistant director of PAHO said during a weekly news conference. “They are not real vaccines or maybe they are stolen doses from a health facility that no one can assure that they were properly stored,” Barbosa said.

On Wednesday, The Wall Street Journal reported that Pfizer had identified counterfeit vaccines in Mexico and in Poland. According to the report, 80 people in Mexico had been jabbed with fake doses in a clinic, after paying \$1,000 per dose.

According to the report, the people who received the fake vaccines were not adversely affected. Citing authorities, the report said in Poland the fake vaccines were seized before they were administered.

During Wednesday’s news conference, PAHO Director Carissa Etienne said the organisation was also concerned about vaccine hesitancy. She said “insidious rumours and conspiracy theories” were “inspiring fear and costing lives.” She said PAHO was working with tech companies to tackle misinformation that has quickly proliferated on the internet and on social media sites.

The PAHO director said: “Because unreliable information spreads quickly, PAHO is collaborating with tech companies like Twitter, Google, and Facebook to address fake news and ensure the public can easily find accurate information.”

The reports of fake vaccines and vaccine hesitancy in the Americas came amid a scarce supply of vaccines in the region, and a rising number of COVID-19 cases. Brazil has so far vaccinated 11.6 percent of its population and Mexico has vaccinated 8.7 percent. Other nations in the region are lagging far behind.

Nearly half of the world’s coronavirus deaths in recent weeks were in the Americas, Etienne said, adding that nearly every country in Central America is reporting a rise in infections. Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, she said, were the worst hit.

“Over the weekend, the world reached a tragic milestone – more than three million have lost their lives to COVID, and nearly half of these deaths happened right here in the Americas,” Etienne said.

Chile is seeing a plateau in cases, while Brazil is reporting a drop. But despite the drop, Etienne said, cases in Brazil “remain alarmingly high.” Argentina ranked third regionally in the weekly number of new cases. Colombia, Venezuela, Bolivia and Uruguay were also seeing a worsening. And Mexico, after weeks of decline in new cases, is seeing a slight increase.

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