

PAHO says it is buying more COVID vaccines for Americas

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Less than 1 percent of people in Haiti are fully vaccinated against the coronavirus, PAHO Director Carissa Etienne said on Wednesday [File: Joseph Odelyn/AP Photo]

Washington, September 30 (RHC)-- The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) has said it is pushing to secure additional COVID-19 vaccines for residents of the Americas amid huge discrepancies in vaccination rates between countries in the region.

PAHO, the Americas branch of the World Health Organization (WHO), announced that it had reached an agreement with Chinese vaccine maker Sinovac to buy 8.5 million vaccine doses for 2021 and another 80 million doses next year.

PAHO Director Carissa Etienne said vaccine donations, including through the United Nations-backed COVAX programme, are the “fastest way” to support countries in the region, but the organisation is also relying on purchases to bolster supply.

“Our Revolving Fund is in advanced discussions with vaccine manufacturers to buy additional COVID vaccines on behalf of all member states to complement bilateral deals, donations and doses that they are receiving via the COVAX mechanism,” Etienne told reporters.

She noted vaccination rates were progressing in the Americas, where more than one billion doses have been administered to date, but she stressed that “coverage is not uniform.” “While Canada, Chile, Uruguay and Puerto Rico have fully vaccinated over 70 percent of their populations, 10 countries and territories in our region have yet to reach 20 percent of their populations,” she said. “And in Haiti, fewer than 1 percent of people have been protected thus far.”

“We are in negotiations with all the producers who have emergency use authorisation from the WHO ... and we are in fairly advanced negotiations to probably sign this week or next week with two other producers who have offered vaccines for the last quarter of 2021 and for 2022,” Barbosa said.

More than 550,000 people have died due to the coronavirus in the Americas, according to PAHO figures, which accounts for approximately 55 percent of global fatalities. Etienne said on Wednesday that the region recorded the highest share of new COVID-19 infections in the world last week at 1.5 million new cases, while it also reported more than 26,000 coronavirus-related deaths.

Despite a decline in new cases in the United States, Canada is among several countries in the region that have seen recent upticks in infections. The Canadian Medical Association warned on Wednesday that the healthcare systems in the central provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan were “crumbling”, calling for increased vaccinations and public health measures to “aggressively control” the rise in infections.

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