

WHO seeks \$23 billion to end COVID pandemic as global health emergency

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Only 10 percent of people in low-income countries have received one dose of COVID-19, compared with almost 68 percent in richer countries

Geneva, February 9 (RHC)-- The World Health Organization (WHO) is urging wealthier countries to step up and end the COVID-19 pandemic as a global health emergency by helping low and middle-income nations obtain tests, treatments and vaccines.

The appeal, launched on Wednesday, asks 55 of the world's richest nations to provide \$23 billion in funding. The money will go to the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator program, a global

initiative set up to develop and equitably distribute tests, treatments and vaccines.

“Supporting the rollout of tools to fight COVID-19 globally will help to curb virus transmission, break the cycle of variants, relieve overburdened health workers and systems, and save lives,” the WHO said in a statement.

It described the disparities in access to COVID-19 tools as “vast”, noting for example that only 10 percent of people in low-income countries have received at least one vaccine dose. That is far below the 68 percent coverage in richer countries.

The statement also noted that of the 4.7 billion COVID-19 tests that have been administered globally, only 22 million were carried out in low-income countries. That is 0.4 percent of the total.

“This massive inequity not only costs lives, it also hurts economies and risks the emergence of new, more dangerous variants that could rob current tools of their effectiveness and set even highly-vaccinated populations back many months,” the statement said.

The requested donations will enable ACT-Accelerator to drive in-country rollouts to get vaccines into arms and help achieve the global target of 70 percent coverage in all countries by mid-2022. It will also allow the initiative to buy the tests, treatments, oxygen and personal protective equipment needed in low-income countries.

“The rapid spread of Omicron makes it even more urgent to ensure tests, treatments and vaccines are distributed equitably globally,” the WHO’s chief, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said in the statement.

“If higher-income countries pay their fair share of the ACT-Accelerator costs, the partnership can support low- and middle-income countries to overcome low COVID-19 vaccination levels, weak testing, and medicine shortages. Science gave us the tools to fight COVID-19; if they are shared globally in solidarity, we can end COVID-19 as a global health emergency this year.”

South Africa and Norway, which co-chair the ACT-Accelerator’s Facilitator Council, said they have written to 55 of the wealthiest countries asking them to contribute their “fair-share” to the required amount. The “fair-share” asks were mostly calculated based on the size of a country’s economy.

According to the WHO, only six countries met or exceeded their “fair-share” commitments last year. They are Canada, Germany, Kuwait, Norway, Saudi Arabia and Sweden. The United States only met 64 percent.

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