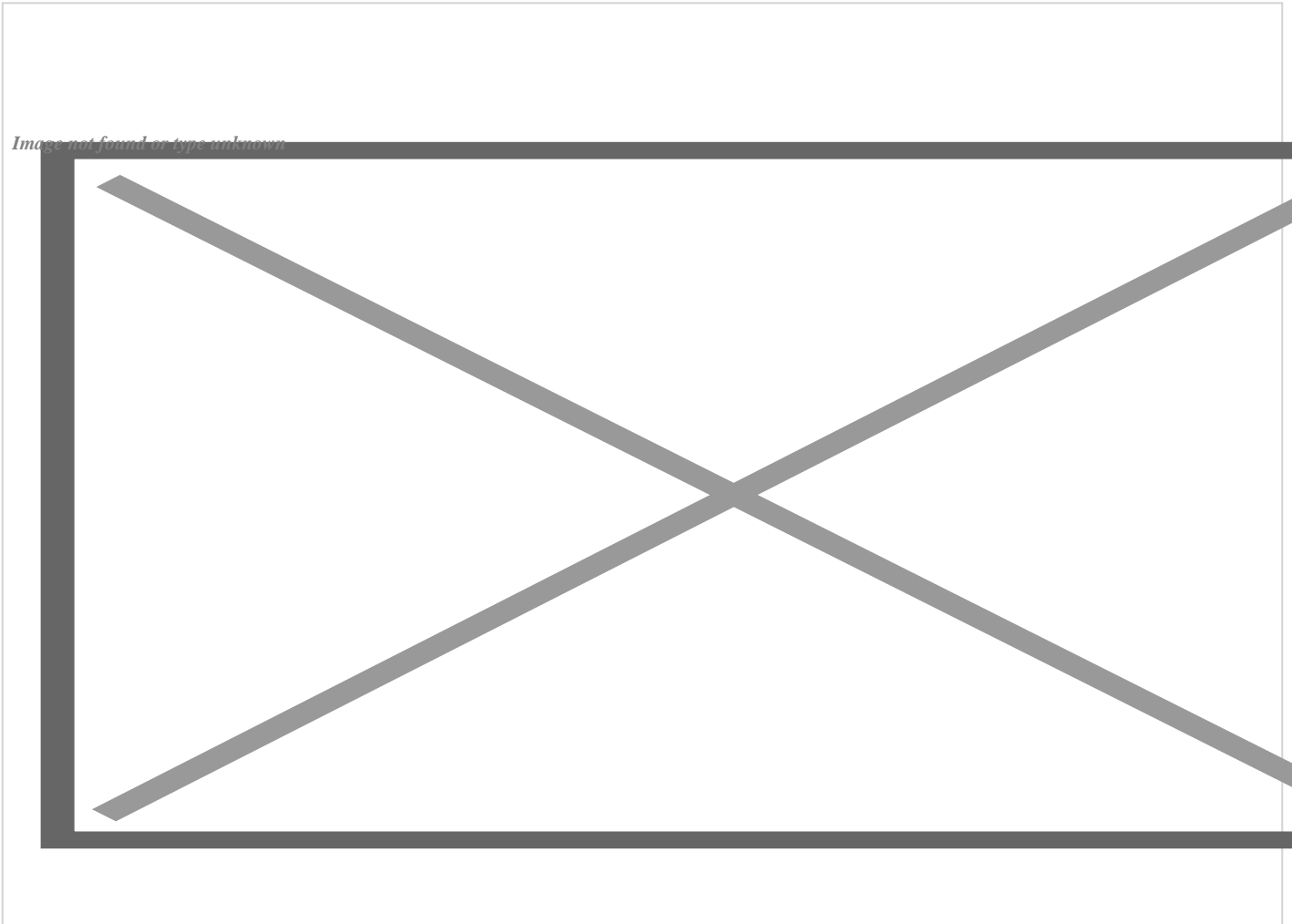


PAHO urges reintroduction of face masks due to COVID-19 increase



Washington, July 14 (RHC)-- The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) urged on Wednesday the governments of the region to reinforce measures against COVID-19, such as the reintroduction of the use of masks or face masks, physical distancing, diagnostic tests and vaccination, due to the increase of infections in the last week.

During her weekly briefing, PAHO director, Carissa Etienne, reported that "in the regional universe, COVID-19 cases increased by 2 percent in South America and by 59.9 percent in Central America. Cases decreased by 5.2 percent in the Caribbean and 4.5 percent in North America."

Etienne warned that the virus continues to evolve, motivated by the emergence of the BA4 and BA5 subvariants of Omicron, the latter being present in at least 22 countries. In addition, he suggested States

remain vigilant given the increase in international travel.

"This means reintroducing public health measures such as face masks and social distancing when the number of cases rises. Some countries have already started to do this, it also means accelerating our efforts to reach everyone with vaccines," he said. The organization predicts that BA5 "will become the prevalent strain in all sub-regions in the coming weeks."

Etienne also praised the value of the Covid-19 vaccines and stressed that thanks to their use, nearly 4 million deaths have been prevented in the region, which is why he called on countries to maintain or surpass the vaccination rates achieved. It also called on countries to work together to meet the demand for vaccines, medicines and electromedical equipment in the region.

PAHO was concerned about countries such as Mexico, which presents a complex epidemiological situation due to a continuous increase in Covid-19 cases. It stated that during the past week, 166,000 new positive patients were diagnosed in that country, with 302 deaths. In the last 15 days, Mexico registered 226,000 cases, in the midst of the fifth wave of contagions.

PAHO announced that, so far, the region has accumulated 1,325 diagnosed cases of smallpox since May 10, in 14 countries and territories, representing 14 percent of patients worldwide.

"No deaths have been reported in the Americas region, but this is not to say that the situation is not a cause for concern. It is of concern, given that some of the countries in our region are reporting an upward trend in recent weeks," Etienne stressed.

The official assured that, although "the risks to global public health so far are considered moderate", among her priorities is "to train and prepare national laboratories, given that this is a new virus in the region".

In this regard, she acknowledged that PAHO has developed workshops for health personnel in Jamaica, Mexico and Brazil, as well as a virtual session for more than 60 participants, organized with the support of Barbados, which offered health guidelines to be considered for clinical diagnosis, the evolution of the disease, its prevention and control.

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