



HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

WHO Says Omicron Variant Pushing Up World COVID Cases, Deaths

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The World Health Organization (WHO) says COVID cases increased by 18 percent around the world in the last week. The rise is mostly due to the BA.4 and BA.5 Omicron versions, or variants, of the virus.

Cases increased the most in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Europe and the Americas.

The United Nations health agency said 4.1 million new cases were reported last week around the world. Deaths increased in the Middle East, Southeast Asia and the Americas. But the total number worldwide stayed the same as the week before -- at about 8,500.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said cases were on the rise in 110 countries because of the fast-spreading Omicron variants. Omicron was first discovered in southern Africa in November 2021.

In a news briefing, Tedros said “the pandemic is changing but it is not over.” He also noted that the health agency's ability to study the virus is “under threat,” as nations around the world are decreasing their efforts to track COVID. He said less **genetic sequencing** will make it harder to notice new and possibly dangerous variants.

Tedros called again for nations to vaccinate people most at risk, including healthcare workers and people over 60. He said hundreds of millions of people remain unvaccinated and at risk of severe disease and death.

The rate of **immunization** stands at about 13 percent in poor countries. About 1.2 billion vaccines have been given out around the world.

Tedros said it is hard to believe that some people might suggest poor countries “should not **boost** and vaccinate their most at-risk (people).” He noted rich countries are vaccinating children as young as 6 months and are planning new vaccination efforts.

Charity organization Oxfam and the People’s Vaccine Alliance say less than half of the 2.1 billion vaccines promised by the Group of Seven large economies have been delivered.

In June, the United States began offering vaccinations for babies and very young children. The U.S. has also started to work on boosters for later this year that would target the latest COVID variants.

I’m Dan Friedell.

Dan Friedell adapted this story for Learning English based on a report by the Associated Press.

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Words in This Story

genetic sequencing – *n.* a way of mapping the parts of a cell of a living thing in order to keep track of changes

vulnerable – *adj.* open to harm or damage

immunization – *n.* the act of giving people a vaccine to prevent infection by a disease

boost – *v.* to increase the force or power of something, in this case the strength of a vaccine
