

Omicron causing hospitalizations and deaths, WHO chief on impact of new variant

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- COVID is circulating far too intensely with many still vulnerable, he said
- For the next few weeks, the situation will remain critical for many countries and their health systems, he added.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Tuesday pointed out Omicron is causing hospitalizations and deaths, and even the less severe cases are inundating health facilities. This comes at a time when Omicron-led infections continue to fill hospitals across the globe.

‘COVID is circulating far too intensely with many still vulnerable.’ He further noted that for the next few weeks, the situation will remain critical for many countries and their health systems. Tedros was speaking at a conference.

"Omicron may be less severe, on average, but the narrative that it is a mild disease is misleading, hurts the overall response and costs more lives.

I remain particularly concerned about many countries that have low #COVID19 vaccination rates, as people are many times more at risk of severe illness and death if they are unvaccinated, he added.

Omicron continues to sweep the Earth globe europe-africa. Last week, there were over 18 million reported cases. The number of deaths remains stable for the moment but we are concerned about the impact Omicron is having on already exhausted and overburdened health systems, he further added.

Last week, Maria Van Kerkhove, Infectious Disease Epidemiologist and COVID-19 Technical Lead, asserted that “Omicron has been detected in all countries where we have good sequencing and it’s likely to be in all countries around the world. It is quickly, in terms of its circulation, overtaking Delta. And so Omicron is becoming the dominant variant that is being detected.”

She further cautioned that even though there is some information that Omicron causes less severe disease than Delta, “it’s not a mild disease” because “people are still being hospitalized for Omicron.

“This variant has been shown to have a shorter doubling time as compared to previous variants, with transmission occurring even amongst those vaccinated or with a history of prior SARS-CoV-2 infection; there is increasing evidence that this variant is able to evade immunity,” a WHO update pointed out.

Echoing a similar view, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus also said: "While Omicron causes less severe disease than Delta, it remains a dangerous virus, particularly for those who are unvaccinated," news agency AFP reported.

Upholding data that only 5 per cent people of low-income countries are vaccinated against COVID-19, the WHO chief also pointed out towards the urgency to make all efforts to vaccinate 70 per cent of global populations by mid-2020.