

## Covid still remains deadly- WHO chief warns amid new variants circulating

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Covid remains a major public health danger, World Health Organisation (WHO) emergency committee on Covid-19 on Wednesday unanimously affirmed. The world health agency further insisted that countries must stop dropping their guard. Also, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus pointed out that the world is "still in the middle of the pandemic" and the fact that "Covid still remains deadly". The committee meets every three months to discuss the pandemic and reports to WHO chief.

Noting that many nations relaxing public health and social measures, and drastically reducing testing for the virus, WHO said, "Now is not the time to let our guard down -- on the contrary, and this is an extremely strong recommendation."

"The situation is far from over with regard to the Covid-19 pandemic, the circulation of the virus is still very active, mortality remains high and the virus is evolving in an unpredictable way," committee chair Didier Houssin warned during a press conference.

"Now is not the time for relaxation on this virus, nor weakness in surveillance, testing and reporting, nor laxity in public and social health measures and no resignation when it comes to vaccination."

'Middle' phase of COVID pandemic

Globally, in the week to Sunday, the number of new Covid-19 cases and deaths continued to decline for a third consecutive week, with more than seven million cases and over 22,000 deaths reported. This was the lowest number of Covid deaths since the early days of the pandemic. But, some countries continue to report serious spikes in cases, which is putting pressure on hospitals, said Tedros, adding that the world is "still in the middle of the pandemic".

"This virus has over time become more transmissible and it remains deadly especially for the unprotected and unvaccinated that don't have access to health care and antivirals," he said.

WHO chief urged all to get vaccinated and continue following COVID protocols.

"The committee unanimously agreed that the Covid-19 pandemic still constitutes an extraordinary event that continues to adversely affect the health of populations around the world, poses an ongoing risk of international spread," it said in a statement Wednesday.

The WHO said the Omicron variant accounted for 99.2 percent of samples collected in the last 30 days that have been sequenced and uploaded to the GISAID global science initiative, with the previously-dominant Delta variant now less than 0.1 percent

(With inputs from agencies)