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As COVID-19 variant continues to spread, World Health Organization warns “we expect things to only get worse”

The more infectious and deadly Delta variant of the coronavirus, first detected in India last October, is now present in at least 80 countries, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). It is expected to overtake the Alpha variant, first detected in the UK, in the coming months as the dominant variant of the coronavirus worldwide.

In countries such as India and the United Kingdom, it has already become the dominant variant of the coronavirus, with at least 90 percent of all new cases caused by the Delta variant. In countries such as the United States, it accounts for at least 10 percent of all new cases and will “probably” become the dominant variant in the country, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Rochelle Walensky warned Friday on Good Morning America.



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A driver in protective suit in a school bus assigned to take people who tested positive for coronavirus to a referral hospital in Jakarta, Indonesia, June 18, 2021 [Credit: AP Photo/Dita Alangkara]

In Lisbon, Portugal, authorities ordered a weekend lockdown of the entire region after more than 1,300 new cases were recorded in the past 24 hours, of which roughly half were of the Delta variant. In Moscow, local health authorities have determined that the Delta variant is now the most prevalent COVID-19 variant in the city, making up 89.3 percent of all new cases.

And in India, while cases and deaths have continued to decline, with confirmed counts currently standing at two-month lows of 69,000 and 1,600 respectively, experts are concerned that such figures greatly undercount the true toll the Delta variant took on India when it began to spread like wildfire in late February and early March.

There are also surges of the Delta variant across Africa and South Asia, including countries such as Namibia, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Rwanda, Myanmar, Zambia, South Africa, Bangladesh, and Indonesia. As a result of the spread of the disease, the global decline in new cases since the beginning of May, largely a result of mass vaccination campaigns in the world's wealthier countries, has slowed.

Worldwide, the number of new cases on Thursday totaled just over 367,000, just 20,000 less than new cases reported seven days previously. In contrast, the decrease in daily new cases from two weeks ago to one week ago was more than 71,000. Similar changes were detected in the trajectory of the world's daily new coronavirus cases in the weeks leading up to the emergence of the Alpha variant as the dominant form of the coronavirus, which helped to fuel the skyrocketing cases this past December and January. Daily deaths remain above 9,000 internationally.

World Health Organization Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus further warned on Friday, "Every region has countries that are now facing a steep increase in cases and deaths. Many countries in Latin America have rapidly increasing epidemics, and others have plateaued at a high level. In Africa, cases have increased by 52% just in the past week, and deaths have increased by 32%. And we expect things to only get worse."

Spikes in the Delta variant are particularly happening in the countries and regions that have the lowest vaccination rates. "It's a trajectory that is very, very concerning," said Dr. Mike Ryan, the World Health Organization's executive director. "The brutal reality is that in an era of multiple variants, with increased transmissibility, we have left vast swathes of the population, the vulnerable population of Africa, unprotected by vaccines."

The emergence of the Delta variant as dominant is even more concerning given how dangerous it has shown itself to be. It is up to 60 percent more infectious than the Alpha variant, and thus up to 2.5 times more infectious than the original wild variant. It also causes more than 4 times as many hospitalizations as the wild variant. And while those fully vaccinated are largely protected from the Delta variant, most of the world remains extremely vulnerable.

As Dr. Tedros noted, "More than half of all high- and upper-middle income countries and economies have now administered enough doses to fully vaccinate at least 20% of their populations. Just 3 out of 79 low- and lower-middle income countries have reached the same level." He also made explicit that, "Vaccines donated next year will be far too late for those who are dying today, or being infected today, or at risk today," before calling for further increases in vaccine production and for their more equal distribution around the world.

Moreover, data from Public Health England tracking the Delta variant has revealed that this particular mutation of the coronavirus can "escape" immunity granted by those that have only received their first dose of the two-dose mRNA vaccine regimen developed by Moderna, Pfizer and others. Thousands have gotten sick as a result.

These dangers are compounded by the fact that as the virus is allowed to spread among those partially vaccinated, there is every possibility that, under the selective pressure of partial immunity, it will evolve to evade the immunity of those fully vaccinated.

In a world where public health measures such as masking, testing and contact tracing are largely being abandoned, such a development would reignite the pandemic in an even more explosive form. Vaccination is in many areas the only form of protection against the coronavirus, and if it fails, cities could once again resemble the horrors of Wuhan, Italy and New York City in the early days of the pandemic.

And in many ways, this evolution of the pandemic would be even worse. Records from the UK indicate that children are more susceptible to the Delta variant, meaning that reopened schools are not just vectors of transmission but also have the potential to become charnel houses for the youth that attend them. More broadly, the increased infectiousness of the Delta variant indicates that, if it was not stopped by vaccines, a dozen people infected could become millions inside a month.

There is no shortage of warnings about just how bad the pandemic could become, even in countries with high vaccination rates like the United States. To date, nearly 4 million lives have been lost. On the other hand, there are still *7.8 billion lives* which can be saved from premature death caused by the coronavirus.

The capitalist class which controls society's resources, however, is more concerned with making profits than human lives. Only token amounts of funds are directed towards vaccines and next to nothing for other life-saving public health measures. The real solution to the pandemic is not medical or scientific, but social and political, the international working class taking the immense wealth hoarded by the bourgeoisie and using it to end the mass death inflicted on the world over the past 18 months.

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