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WHO warns that Delta variant of coronavirus will “pick off” the unvaccinated

Officials of the World Health Organization issued a stark warning Monday that the Delta variant of coronavirus posed a major danger to the world’s population and that rates of serious disease and death could rise significantly unless vaccination efforts were stepped up, particularly in the poorer countries.

At a press briefing, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that Africa, the Americas and Asia “are facing steep epidemics. These cases and deaths are largely avoidable. ... The inequitable access to vaccines has demonstrated that in a crisis, low-income countries cannot rely on vaccine-producing countries to supply their needs.”



Cemetery workers transport the remains of a COVID-19 victim for burial in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Saturday, May 22, 2021. (AP Photo/Mario De Fina)

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Ghebreyesus harked back to the denial of anti-retroviral drugs to countries affected by HIV, and the price-gouging of insulin supplies for countries affected by diabetes, although the drug has been known for a century. Criticizing the pharmaceutical industry, he argued for sharing technical knowledge and waiving intellectual property rights: “The COVID-19 crisis has shown that relying on a few companies to supply global public needs is limiting and dangerous.”

Dr. Maria Van Kerkove, the WHO technical lead on COVID-19, explained that the Delta variant was spreading rapidly around the world, because “it has an opportunity to spread given that we have increased social mixing, relaxation of public health and social measures, or the inappropriate use of public health and social measures. ... And given that we don’t have full vaccination, it will spread.”

The Delta variant has been detected in 92 countries, she said, but so far the two-dose vaccinations “remain effective against severe disease and death, but we need two doses to be administered.

“Public health measures are effective but need to be administered longer,” she said, adding, “Some countries have public health measures and the vaccine. Some have public health measures without the vaccine. That is not a fair fight against this variant.”

Dr. Mike Ryan, executive director of the WHO Health Emergencies Program, also emphasized the dangers of the new variant for people of the poorer countries who have largely been deprived of access to the vaccines by the policies of the main vaccine-producing countries.

“This particular Delta variant is faster, it is fitter, it will pick off the more vulnerable more efficiently than previous variants,” he said, “and therefore if there are vulnerable people left without vaccination, they remain even at further risk.

“All of the viruses have been lethal in their own regard. This virus has the potential to be more lethal, because it is more efficient in the way that it transmits between humans, and it will eventually find those most vulnerable individuals who will become severely ill, have to be hospitalized, and potentially die.”

He concluded, “We can protect those people now with relatively small transfers of vaccine from the global supply. We can protect those vulnerable people, those front-line workers. And the fact that hasn’t happened, as the director-general has said again and again, is a catastrophic moral failure at the global level.”

What all three officials of the global health agency were remarking on—while avoiding naming any names—was the policy of vaccine nationalism, hoarding vaccines, and refusing to waive intellectual property rights, engaged in by the major imperialist powers, particularly the United States, Britain, France and Germany.

The Biden administration in the United States has flatly refused appeals that Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson be required to transfer technology to India, South Africa and other developing countries that have existing pharmaceutical production capacity, and to stop price-gouging for shipments of the life-saving vaccines.

Britain and the European Union have adopted a similar policy for their own drug manufacturers.

All the imperialist powers treat vaccine supplies as a weapon in the global struggle for influence, power and strategic advantage against China and Russia, as well as against each other.

As for the warnings by WHO doctors and scientists that the Delta virus will “pick off” the vulnerable, there are many in the ruling classes of the imperialist powers who regard that as a positive feature. They regard the lives of the elderly and infirm in their own countries as a drain on resources that could go to profits and the amassing of personal wealth. They care even less for the lives of hundreds of millions facing disease and death in the poor countries.

Dr. Ryan noted, quite correctly, that “convergent evolution” is a growing threat to humanity as a whole. The mutation of the coronavirus is facilitated and fueled by the existence of a large pool of unvaccinated people. No variant has yet found the deadliest combination of transmissibility and lethality, he said, but the Delta variant is a major step in that direction. There will be many more potential new variants if the pandemic is not shut down.

Hundreds of millions of people are in danger in the imperialist countries as well, despite the efforts by governments and the corporate media to spread complacency and declare the pandemic over. In Britain, the Delta variant has now become the dominant strain. It now accounts for 19 percent of all US cases, up from 7 percent two weeks ago.

Eight US states have had sharp increases in the number of cases over the past week because of the Delta variant. All of them are states with low vaccination rates and state governments which have halted virtually all public health measures against COVID-19.

The Biden administration issued Monday an international distribution list for a pathetic 80 million doses of US-owned vaccines. Given that there are nearly 6 billion people unvaccinated in the world, this barely qualifies as a drop in the bucket. Much of it is intended for the use of the ruling elite and military forces in client countries, like the 2.5 million doses for Taiwan, which has rejected the offer of the Chinese-made Sinovax, to the detriment of its own people.

As for the 2 billion doses in aid, pledged by the US and other G7 powers at their recent summit, given that effective vaccination with most vaccines requires two doses, this amounts to a declaration that only 1 billion of the 6 billion unvaccinated people in the world can expect any help from the wealthy imperialist countries. The remaining 5 billion people will face the terrors of a lethal virus with only masks and limited social distancing, if that.

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