

World Health Organization warns of new pandemic wave as cases surge in Europe and US

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The number of daily new cases of COVID-19 has surged over the past week in the United States, as the government eliminates all remaining restrictions on the spread of the disease even as the dangerous Delta variant becomes prevalent.

In the United States, where the Delta variant has been detected in all 50 states, daily cases have turned upwards, having risen 14.8 percent compared to the previous week.

In Europe, COVID-19 cases have surged 29 percent higher than the previous week.

“There will be a new wave in the WHO European region unless we remain disciplined,” warned WHO Regional Director for Europe Hans Kluge.

The Delta variant of the coronavirus (B.1.617.2), which ravaged India in May, has now rapidly swept across more than 85 countries, frustrating many countries that had planned to lift restrictions and reopen their economies before the summer tourist season. Only in South America has the Gamma variant, also known as P.1, remained dominant and is ravaging the continent.

Presently, according to Worldometer, there have been over 183 million cases of COVID-19 worldwide. The death count is fast approaching 4 million. However, this is known to be a gross underestimation, with modeling studies suggesting the death toll could be a magnitude of three times higher.

Despite the weeks of declines beginning in the early part of April, the global incidence of cases is again rising. Yesterday, the seven-day average stood at 378,000 COVID-19 cases. The seven-day moving average for deaths continues to remain high at over 8,000 per day. Though deaths continue to decline, they

lag the trends in COVID cases and are expected to follow in step in the next week or two.

In the United States, increases have been most prominent in Southern and Western states, where vaccination rates are below the national averages, according to the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy.

Dr. Anthony Fauci said this week: “I’m very concerned about the stark disparity between places with low and high vaccination rates. When you have such a low level of vaccination superimposed upon a variant that has a high degree of efficiency of spread, what you are going to see among under-vaccinated regions—be those states, cities or counties—you’re going to see these individual types of blips. It’s almost like it’s going to be two Americas.”

The highest case rates were in Nevada and Arkansas, with a 55 percent increase over the past seven days. Missouri and Wyoming saw almost a 20 percent rise over a week. In all, the United States reported more than 14,000 new cases and 249 deaths yesterday. There have been more than 34.5 million COVID-19 cases and over 620,000 deaths during the pandemic.

Indeed, the Independence Day weekend will add fuel to the fire. The holiday is expected to be the busiest travel period since the pandemic. Approximately 48 million people are planning to travel, primarily by car. AAA (American Automobile Association) forecasted that 3.5 million people would be flying, “bringing airlines back to 90 percent of pre-pandemic traffic.”

Eric Topol, professor of molecular medicine at the Scripps Research Institute, said of the Delta variant: “It is the most hyper-transmissible, contagious version of the virus we’ve seen to date, for sure—it’s a

superspreader strain if there ever was one.” Also, recent studies indicate that the Delta variant may produce more severe disease. A recent study published in *The Lancet* on June 14, noted that hospitalization rates of patients with the Delta strain were about 85 percent higher than those that were infected with the Alpha variant.

Despite the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) recommendation that vaccinated individuals need not wear masks, health officials in Los Angeles strongly encouraged everyone, regardless of their vaccine status, to wear them indoors due to the threat posed by the highly transmissible strain of the coronavirus. During their last press briefing on COVID-19, the World Health Organization also recommended that all people wear masks indoors, including fully vaccinated people.

The United States’ vaccination campaign has stalled, remaining precariously at around 1 million vaccinations per day. Only 46.7 percent of the population has been fully vaccinated, with 54.4 percent having received at least a single dose. The current projections place August 2 as the estimated date when at least 70 percent of all adults in the US will have received at least one dose of the COVID vaccines, far behind the White House’s estimations.

The situation in Russia is growing direr by the day as deaths have surpassed the winter highs. Yesterday, 672 had succumbed to the infection, with 124 deaths in Moscow and 110 in St. Petersburg. Still, thousands of supporters were permitted to view the games as the quarter-final matches between Spain and Switzerland were given the go-ahead as planned. Meanwhile, Moscow’s Mayor Sergei Sobyenin confirmed that nearly 2,000 people are being hospitalized daily.

Sixty-five percent of the population have received at least one dose of the COVID vaccines in the UK. Still, there has been a 67 percent increase in cases of COVID-19 from a week before. The Delta variant now accounts for 97 percent of all COVID cases. Yesterday, they reported close to 28,000 new infections in contrast to just 3,165 on June 1. The epidemiological curves are rising exponentially.

Hans Kluge, Europe’s regional director for the WHO, has blamed these reversals in trends in relaxing restrictions and increased travel as the tourist season gets underway. Additionally, the Euro 2020 soccer

tournament has drawn huge crowds of spectators from numerous countries mixing in crowded surroundings. Restaurants, pubs and bars are filled with patrons. Public transportation is brimming with fans and spectators. Reuters reported that this week almost 2,000 people from Scotland traveled to London for their game against England while infected with COVID-19.

“I am not here to pour cold water on any EURO 2020 fan of anyone’s holidays,” Kluge said. “But before we watch our players, and before we all pack and go for some well-deserved rest near home or far away, it is my imperative to give [some] messages. If you decide to travel and gather, assess the risks and do it safely, keeping all life-saving reflexes of masks and self-protection, especially indoors and in crowds.” He warned that Europe would be Delta dominant by August. He also noted that vaccination rates remain too slow.

Germany’s Interior Minister Horst Seehofer had more choice words for the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), calling them “absolutely irresponsible” for allowing 40,000 fans to watch the match between Germany and England at Wembley Stadium on Tuesday. “I have the suspicion that this is about commerce again,” he said. “And commerce must not outshine the protection of the population against infection.”

Dr. Eric Feigl-Ding, who has been prominent in educating the public on the pandemic and the science behind the SARS-CoV-2 virus, tweeted: “Anyone who doubts the delta variant wave is coming only needs to look at Israel and the UK—two of the most heavily vaccinated countries in the world.”



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