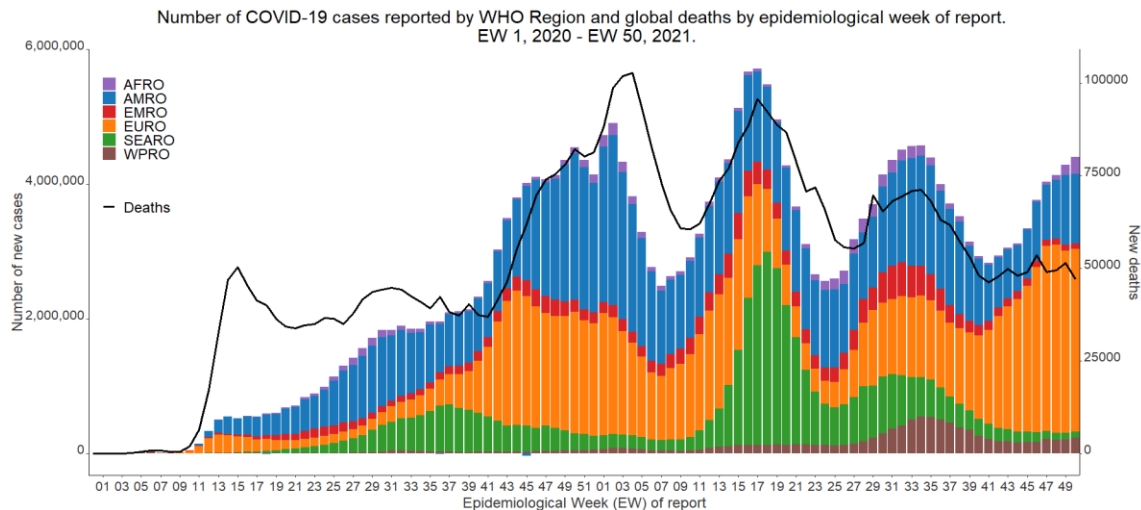


In the context of the increase in cases and hospitalizations due to COVID-19 in several countries within and outside of the Americas Region, the Pan American Health Organization / World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) recommends Member States to take extreme measures to strengthen vaccination efforts, organize health services to respond to a high demand and, above all, reduce the risk given by the social interactions that are expected during the end of the year celebrations and the upcoming holiday period.

Situation Summary

Since epidemiological week (EW) 40 of 2021, there has been an increasing trend in cases and deaths associated with COVID-19 at the global level, with the highest number of cases and deaths reported in Europe and the Americas.

Figure 1. Distribution of global COVID 19 confirmed cases and deaths, by epidemiological week (EW) of report and WHO Region, as of EW 50 of 2021.



Note:

AFRO: WHO Regional Office for Africa; AMRO: WHO Regional Office for the Americas; EMRO: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; EURO: WHO Regional Office for Europe; SEARO: WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia; WPRO: WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific

Source: WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) data reproduced by PAHO/WHO. Available at: <https://covid19.who.int/info/>. Accessed on 22 December 2021.

Suggested citation: Pan American Health Organization / World Health Organization. Epidemiological Update: Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). 23 December 2021, Washington, D.C.: PAHO/WHO; 2021

In the Region of the Americas

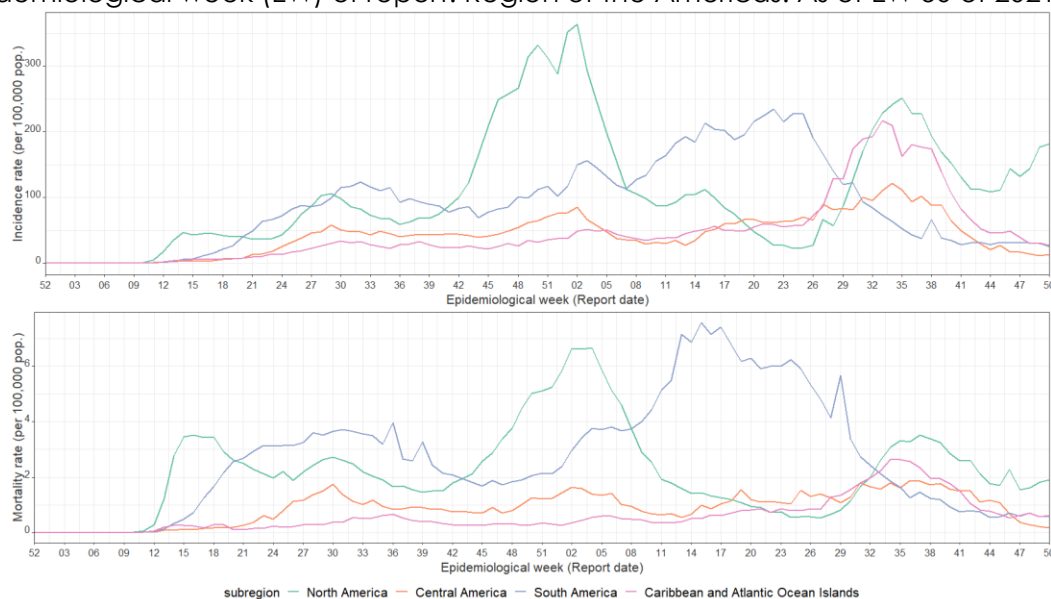
From January 2020, when the first cases were detected, and as of EW 50 of 2021, 99,653,422 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 2,384,638 deaths, were reported in 56 countries and territories in the Region of the Americas. Of the total number of cases and deaths reported globally, 36.4% of the cases and 44.6% of the deaths were in the Americas.

Comparing the current 4-week period (EW 47-EW 50) with the previous one (EW 43-EW 46), the number of cases reported in the Region increased by 18.5%. There were also increases in AFRO (449%), EURO (29.3%) and WPRO (25.1%).

The North America subregion¹ has reported the highest incidence of new cases in EW 50 (182 cases per 100,000 population), followed by the Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands² (26.8 cases per 100,000 population), South America³ (25.1 cases per 100,000 population) and Central America⁴ (12.9 per 100,000 population). (**Figure 2a**).

The subregion of North America reported the highest mortality rate in the Region during EW 50 (1.9 deaths per 100,000 population) while in the other subregions the mortality rate was less than 1 death per 100,000 population. (**Figure 2b**).

Figure 2a-b. Incidence and mortality rates of COVID-19 (per 100,000 population) by subregion and epidemiological week (EW) of report. Region of the Americas. As of EW 50 of 2021.



Source: Information shared by IHR National Focal Points (NFPs) or published on the websites of the Ministries of Health, Health Agencies or similar and reproduced by PAHO/WHO.

¹ Canada, Mexico, and United States of America

² Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, Bonaire, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Cuba, Curaçao, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Falkland Islands, French Guiana, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Martinique, Montserrat, Puerto Rico, Saba, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, San Bartolomé, Saint Martin, Saint Pierre and Miquelon, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sint Eustatius, Sint Maarten, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, and the United States Virgin Islands.

³ Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

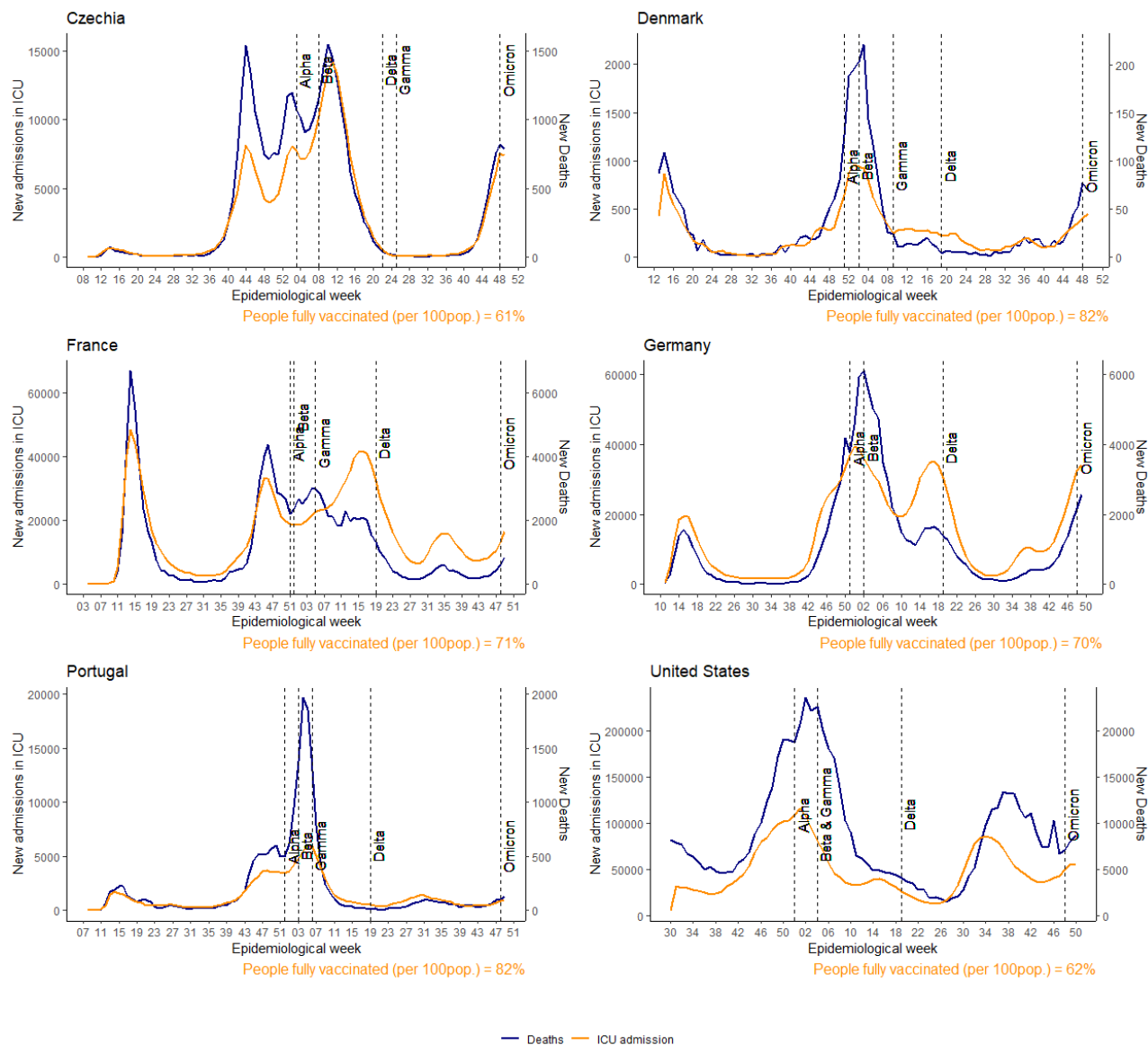
⁴ Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama.

Highlights

Vaccination, hospitalizations, and deaths

In several European countries, the increasing trends in Intensive Care Unit (ICU) hospitalizations and deaths due to COVID-19 have been observed since EW 33 of 2021, with a marked acceleration in recent weeks. In the United States of America, although the increasing trend has been observed since EW 28, the situation is similar. (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Distribution of COVID-19 deaths and ICU hospitalizations, in selected countries, by epidemiological week (EW) of report. As of EW 50 of 2021.



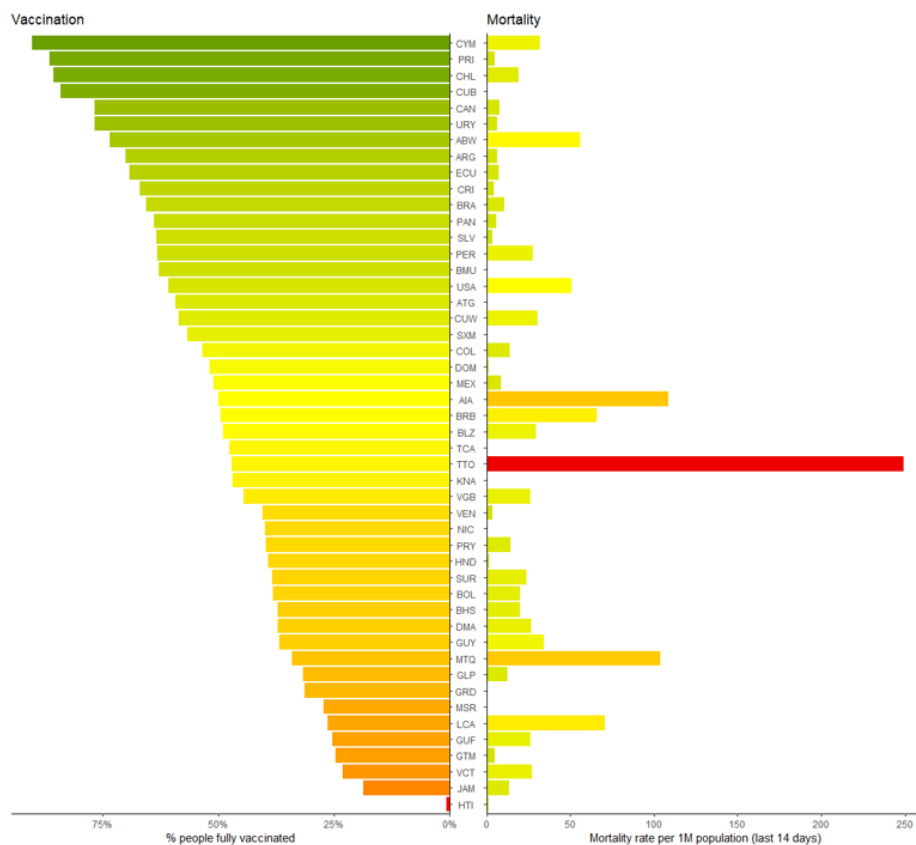
Source: Information shared by IHR National Focal Points (NFPs) or published on the websites of the Ministries of Health, Health Agencies or similar and reproduced by PAHO/WHO. Available at: <https://covid19.who.int/> ; Data on hospitalization and ICU rates and current COVID-19 occupancy. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3sCIQgG> and <https://bit.ly/3Fs5Oe7>.

When considering the proportion of the population fully vaccinated in these countries, in general, the increase in hospitalizations and deaths is more noticeable in countries with lower proportions of fully vaccinated population. These observed differences are not linear since there are other factors such as cultural factors, those related to social distancing, the degree of preparedness and response of health services, among others, which also have a direct impact on these indicators.

As of EW 8 of 2021 (27 February 2021), many countries in the Region of the Americas reported low proportion of fully vaccinated population, with the highest proportion in the United States with 15-25% of its population fully vaccinated. With the expansion of COVID-19 vaccine supplies, by EW 26 (3 July 2021) most countries in the Region of the Americas reported between 10-25% of fully vaccinated population and by EW 50, a high percentage of the population vaccinated with a second dose (or complete vaccine schedule) was reported in several countries and territories including Canada, Cayman Islands, Chile, Cuba, and Uruguay (Figure 4).

Among all the countries/territories in the Region of the Americas, currently 7 have reported more than 70% of fully vaccinated population (Figure 4). A higher mortality rate is observed in countries/territories with vaccination below 50%.

Figure 4. Percentage of the population with complete COVID-19 vaccination schedule at the end of epidemiologic week (EW) 50 of 2021 (left) and COVID-19 mortality rate per 1 million population (right). Region of the Americas.



Source: COVID-19 vaccination and COVID-19 mortality rate in the Region of the Americas. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3EdTePf> and <https://covid19.who.int/>

Guidance for national authorities

The increased circulation of SARS-CoV-2 in some countries within and outside the Region of the Americas, coupled with the increase in interpersonal contacts due to the population movement during the end-of-year and holiday periods, may lead to an increase in cases, hospitalizations, and deaths in several countries of our Region, and additionally may cause saturation of health systems, even in those countries with high ICU and non-ICU capacity.

In addition, national authorities should consider the co-circulation of influenza and other respiratory viruses in various areas of the Americas Region, which requires adequate protocols for triage, detection, appropriate management of cases, and infections prevention and control measures.

The Pan American Health Organization / World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) recommends Member States to take measures to:

- 1) To alert the population about the need to reduce the risk in the context of increased social interactions that are expected during the end of the year celebrations and the upcoming holiday periods.
- 2) Strengthen vaccination efforts for COVID-19 as well as for influenza, aiming to increase the proportion of people vaccinated and preventing severe cases and deaths.
- 3) Adapt health system contingency plans to be able to adequately respond to an eventual increase in the number of cases requiring medical care and hospitalized, as well as to the possibility of a high co-circulation of influenza, other respiratory viruses, and COVID-19.
- 4) Mitigate workforce shortages in both health care and essential services, as increased transmission may result in high absenteeism.

PAHO/WHO continues to reiterate and update recommendations to support all Member States on management and protection measures for COVID-19 and reiterates the general recommendations included in the PAHO/WHO Epidemiological Alerts and Updates on COVID-19 available at: <https://www.paho.org/en/epidemiological-alerts-and-updates>.

The following are guidance, scientific reports, and other resources published by PAHO/WHO and WHO.

<p>Surveillance, rapid response teams, and case investigation</p> 	<p>Clinical management</p> 
<p>WHO resources available at: https://bit.ly/30zjmCj</p> <p>PAHO/WHO resources available at: https://bit.ly/36DJi3B</p>	<p>WHO resources available at: https://bit.ly/3li6wQB</p> <p>PAHO/WHO resources available at: https://bit.ly/3sadTxQ</p>
<p>Laboratory</p> 	<p>Infection prevention and control</p> 
<p>WHO resources available at: https://bit.ly/3d3TJ1g</p> <p>PAHO/WHO resources available at: https://bit.ly/3oD2Qen</p>	<p>WHO resources available at: https://bit.ly/3d2ckuV</p> <p>PAHO/WHO resources available at: https://bit.ly/3nwyOaN</p>
<p>Critical preparedness and response</p> 	<p>Travel, Points of entry, and border health</p> 
<p>WHO resources available at: https://bit.ly/3ljWHBT</p> <p>PAHO/WHO resources available at: https://bit.ly/36DJi3B</p>	<p>WHO resources available at: https://bit.ly/3ivDivW</p> <p>PAHO/WHO resources available at: https://bit.ly/36DJi3B</p>
<p>Schools, workplaces, & other institutions</p> 	<p>Other resources</p>
<p>WHO resources available at: https://bit.ly/3d66iJO</p> <p>PAHO/WHO resources available at: https://bit.ly/36DJi3B</p>	<p>WHO resources available at: https://bit.ly/33zXgRQ</p> <p>PAHO/WHO resources available at: https://bit.ly/36DJi3B</p>

References

1. PAHO/WHO. Epidemiological Update: Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). 2 December 2021, Washington, D.C.: PAHO/WHO; 2021. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3poyuPO>
2. WHO. COVID-19 Weekly Epidemiological Update. Published on 21 December 2021. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3ejBpCY>
3. United States of America. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Data on COVID-19. Available at: <https://bit.ly/32yWeHG>