COVID-19

PAHO/WHO Response. 11 March 2022. Report n. 72

HIGHLIGHTS

On 8 March 2022, PAHO launched the report Gender and Health Analysis: COVID-19 in the Americas, during a webinar to mark International Women's Day. The publication explores the effects of the pandemic on women and girls, and presents findings in areas such as health, employment and social welfare. The launch event included the participation of Karen Sass, Director of Disability of the Ministry of Social Development National Secretariat of Care and Disability of Uruguay, and H.E. Hugh Adsett, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the Organization of American States (OAS). "This report underscores that gender inequality is an ongoing social, economic, political and health crisis, which has been exacerbated by the pandemic," PAHO Director Carissa F. Etienne said. "But it also highlights where we need to work harder to create a more equitable, resilient, and sustainable future," she stressed. During the pandemic, the role of caregiver exposed women to an increased risk of contracting COVID-19. Comprising the vast majority of health care workers, women were on the frontline caring for patients and accounted for 72% of all COVID-19 cases among health care professionals in the Region. "If they had been better protected from the start and with reasonable shifts, many infections could have been avoided," Dr. Etienne said.

On 9 March 2022, PAHO hosted a webinar to share Ecuador’s PAHO/WHO Country Office experience in its engagement with civil society organizations to implement a culturally appropriate and gender-focused risk communications and community engagement strategy to strengthen the COVID-19 response and better prepare for future emergencies. This was the first of a four-session webinar series that is part of the WHO Global Pilot Initiative and Accelerator project. The project directly supports civil society organizations (CSO) to create meaningful impact by mobilizing all sectors and communities in the response to emergencies. This webinar series, taking place throughout March 2022, centers on Ecuador’s experiences as well as regional findings and analysis resulting from the WHO-CSO Engagement Pilot Initiative. The next sessions will present experiences from Country Offices in Guyana, Panama, and Guatemala, where PAHO has led these community-based efforts.
Reported number of cumulative COVID-19 cases in the Region of the Americas and corresponding incidence rate (per 100,000 population) by country/territory as of 5 March 2022.
PAHO/WHO Response (26 February to 11 March 2022)

Following an outbreak of a novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China, rapid community, regional and international spread occurred with exponential growth in cases and deaths. On 30 January 2020, the Director-General (DG) of the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) under the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005). The first case in the Americas was confirmed in the USA on 20 January 2020, followed by Brazil on 26 February 2020. Since then, COVID-19 has spread to all 51 countries and territories in the Americas. On 17 January 2020, the Pan American Sanitary Bureau activated an organization-wide Incident Management Support Team (IMST) to provide its countries and territories with technical cooperation to address and mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. These efforts align with the ten pillars of the 2021 WHO Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan for COVID-19, PAHO’s Response Strategy and Donor Appeal, and PAHO Resolution CD58.R9, approved by its Member States. Since then, the Organization has developed, published, and disseminated evidence-based technical documents to help guide countries’ strategies and policies to manage this pandemic.

Regional

PAHO continued to collaborate with its partners within the Region and across the globe to deliver technical cooperation, evidence-based guidance and recommendations, and to advocate for the Americas on the global stage. PAHO’s regional IMST also provided support and strategic guidance to country-level IMSTs as they coordinated and monitored their national response activities.
PAHO continued to review new and emerging information to build the evidence base to combat the virus. The public has access to PAHO’s COVID-19 Technical Database for technical guidelines, scientific publications, and ongoing research protocols from the Region. This is the result of partnerships with WHO, Cochrane, McMaster University, Epistemonikos, and others.

**Country**

In Chile, Dr. Etienne and Dr. Sylvain Aldighieri, PAHO’s COVID-19 Incident Manager, participated in the High-level Summit of Latin American Health Leaders organized by the Presidency of the Republic. Held both virtually and in-person, the event was directed at health workers, academia, diplomatic and international organization staff, and professionals working on the design and implementation of health actions. The aim of the event is to gather governments and international health authorities to foster international collaboration and the exchange of experiences to prepare for the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Etienne delivered two press briefings during this period. On 2 March 2022, the Director stated that the lack of access to timely care and disruptions of prenatal services are to blame for an increase in maternal mortality in the Americas during the pandemic, with one in three pregnant women unable to access timely critical care. With COVID-19 cases among pregnant women reaching more than 365,000 in the Region over the past two years and deaths surpassing 3,000, the PAHO Director said that “this is a tragedy, especially now that we have safe and effective vaccines.” Pregnant women, in particular, are “among the most vulnerable to COVID-19, due to changes in their immune system, which can put them at risk for severe disease,” she added, urging countries to urgently ramp up access to vaccines, ensure the continuation of health services that women depend on, and improve access to family planning services. Dr. Etienne also highlighted the broader impact that the COVID-19 crisis has had on women and girls, including additional caregiving responsibilities and career disruptions. She highlighted that women, as the majority of the health workforce, have been on the frontlines of the COVID-19 response, accounting for 72% of all COVID-19 cases among health professionals. Turning to the COVID-19 situation in the region, the Director reported that new cases had dropped 32% from the previous week, reaching 1.5 million, while deaths declined by 10%. These downward trends were seen throughout much of the Region, with the exception of Central America, where deaths rose by nearly 16% this week.
During her press briefing on **9 March 2022**, Dr. Etienne warned countries that it is too soon to lower their guard, even though public health measures are being lifted in many parts of the Americas. “When places relax measures at the wrong moment, transmission spikes dangerously and we lose more lives,” Dr. Etienne said, urging countries to base decisions on risk assessments and health data, and to tighten public health guidance if cases go up. Reflecting on the past two years of the pandemic, Dr. Etienne said that the Americas has been hit harder than any other region in the world, with more than 2.6 million lives lost – half of all global deaths. “This is a tragedy of enormous proportions, and its effects will be felt for years to come,” the PAHO Director added. Dr. Etienne also called for countries to address the inequities that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, highlighting that in Latin America and the Caribbean, 248 million people, particularly those in hard-to-reach rural areas and underserved communities, have yet to receive a single dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Turning to the COVID-19 situation, the Director reported that COVID-19 cases had declined by 26% across the Americas in the previous week while deaths also dropped by nearly 19%. Despite the overall decline in cases and deaths in the Region, new cases increased by 2.2% in the Caribbean. Bolivia and Puerto Rico also reported an increase in deaths over the past week.

**Regional**

As the communication needs of the Region evolve, PAHO continues to disseminate key messages across multiple platforms and respond to numerous media inquiries. Communications support is provided to country offices on a variety of issues, particularly regarding COVID-19 vaccines and COVAX. **Infographics** cover a range of issues related to COVID-19, from steps on how to prevent infection to tips on staying healthy and protecting one’s mental health during the pandemic.

**Country**

In **the Caribbean**, during the week of 28 February 2022, PAHO hosted an event to mark the establishment of an international partnership for a **new initiative** aimed at promoting COVID-19 vaccine uptake among health care workers and most at-risk populations in the region. This collaborative effort intends to be a community-driven, inclusive, culturally-responsive and evidence-informed approach to addressing vaccine hesitancy, in the face of pandemic fatigue, misinformation, and relaxation of pandemic protection protocols across the region. This project will be rolled out within the next months and implemented until the end of 2022.

In **Barbados**, on 7 March 2022, PAHO and the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) hosted a press conference on **“Leveraging digital technology to promote COVID-19 vaccine uptake.”** From October 2021 to January 2022, PAHO and ITU promoted a public health education campaign designed to tackle the high level of misinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic – referred to as an infodemic – and vaccine hesitancy in Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, and Saint Lucia. The press conference shared the results of these efforts, as well as reflections on how mobile health solutions can be leveraged to address infodemic misinformation and disinformation and help achieve better health outcomes for the people of the Caribbean.

In **Mexico**, on 11 March 2022, PAHO organized a virtual session to address the infodemic, fake news and misinformation on COVID-19. Held in collaboration with the National Laboratory on Risk Communication of the Federal Health Secretariat, the event was attended by risk communications staff from laboratories, state leadership on health promotion, and from health units of the 32 federal entities. Additionally, on 8 March 2022, PAHO hosted a virtual session to discuss the findings of an analysis of perceptions about the vaccination process in the context of SARS-CoV-2 variants. The Organization also supported the General
Directorate of Health Promotion (DGPS) in the elaboration of plans to produce a documentary on perceptions and risk communication.

In Honduras, PAHO has been supporting a risk communication strategy in the metropolitan health region of San Pedro Sula. Starting in February 2022, the project “Prevention of new infections and deaths for COVID-19 in Honduras” has been promoting educational activities in neighborhoods and settlements by hosting conversations and providing educational material with information to help contain the spread of COVID-19 and other diseases. The initiative also aims to increase vaccination uptake in the region. On 28 February 2022, PAHO also concluded repair work to improve infrastructure and water and sanitation in three health facilities in the metropolitan region of the Central District. The purpose of the initiative is to offer improved health care to patients and a better work environment to health workers, with a positive impact on prevention of COVID-19 transmission in these facilities.

Regional
PAHO developed a Geo-Hub for the Region, which includes a series of dashboards and epidemiological data updated daily. It has four subregional and 56 country/territory/area geo-hubs for the Americas. In addition, PAHO’s interactive dashboard provides information for the public on cumulative cases, deaths, cumulative incidence rate, new cases and deaths, as well as several other epidemiological indicators reported by countries and territories.

PAHO also publishes weekly reports detailing trends in influenza and other respiratory viruses, as well as SARS-CoV-2 surveillance indicators. PAHO continues to analyze trends in the Region, particularly through the collection of COVID-19 nominal data.

Seroprevalence studies have provided the Region with invaluable data on how the virus has spread since the onset of the pandemic. PAHO maintains a dashboard that shows seroprevalence studies in Latin America and the Caribbean, including information on the study design, sampling method, sample sizes, and other factors.
PAHO’s Contact Tracing Knowledge Hub publishes multidisciplinary information on contact tracing for a variety of audiences, including policymakers, responders, researchers, educators, affected communities, and the public. Go.Data is one of the tools available through this platform. It is used to support case investigation and management, display transmission chains, and for contact tracing. In collaboration with GOARN, to date, PAHO/WHO has trained more than 35 countries and territories in the Go.Data app.

PILLAR 4. Points of Entry, International Travel, and Mass Gatherings
Support surveillance and risk communication activities at points of entry as well as implementation of appropriate public health measures

Regional
It is important that risk mitigation measures are always in place, including advice for travelers, particularly regarding the self-monitoring of signs and symptoms; surveillance and case management at the point of entry and across borders; capacities and procedures for international contact tracing; and environmental controls and public health and social measures at points of entry and onboard conveyances.

PAHO will continue to support countries to ensure that these capacities are in place. PAHO will also support countries’ efforts to define a risk-based policy while resuming international traffic in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, considering the provisions of the International Health Regulations (IHR), available scientific evidence, and the most cost-effective use of available resources.

PILLAR 5: Laboratories and Diagnostics
Enhance laboratory capacity to detect COVID-19 cases as well as to manage large-scale testing for COVID-19 domestically or through arrangements with international reference laboratories

Regional
Since the beginning of PAHO’s response to the date of this report, the Organization has provided primers, probes and/or PCR kits for over 21.83 million reactions/tests. To date, PAHO has provided over 706,700 swabs and 365 sampling kits, among other critical materials.

During the reporting period, PAHO continued to provide technical cooperation, including data review, troubleshooting sessions, and follow-up calls on laboratory diagnostics with Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Grenada, Guyana, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Global genomic surveillance efforts have been essential to identifying and detecting SARS-CoV-2 variants. Since the initial identification of SARS-CoV-2, until 11 March 2022, more than 8,727,321 complete genomic sequences from across the world have been shared globally through publicly accessible databases.
5.1 SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern

Given the significant resource requirements needed to sequence all samples in the Region to identify variants, PAHO continues to work closely with the laboratories of the countries of the Americas to help identify samples, which should be prioritized for genomic sequencing. To date, PAHO has distributed **62 unique primers** to detect genetic variants using PCR.

To date, **30 countries** are participating in the **COVID-19 Genomic Surveillance Network**, with reference sequencing laboratories in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama, the United States of America and Trinidad and Tobago, visible on this [dashboard](#). This mechanism will be critical to tracking the spread or appearance of new Variants of Concern (VOCs). During the reporting period, a total of 302 new SARS-CoV-2 full genomes were sequenced and genomic sequencing data was shared through the PAHO COVID-19 Genetic Surveillance Network (COVIGEN) Regional Sequencing Reference Laboratories for COVID-19 in support of countries using external sequencing capacity.

### PILLAR 6: Infection Prevention and Control (IPC), and Protection of the Health Workforce

**Support efforts to reduce human-to-human transmission within health facilities and the community, including through development and implementation of national IPC plans.**

**Regional**

Implementation of national IPC plans are key to reducing COVID-19 transmission at both community and health facility levels. PAHO supports countries by procuring PPE through donations, the Revolving Fund, and training healthcare personnel.

**Country**

In **Brazil**, PAHO trained 35 health care workers in IPC during the week of 26 February 2022, bringing to 150,050 the total number of professionals trained in IPC by PAHO in the country.

### PILLAR 7: Case Management, Clinical Operations, and Therapeutics

**Improve local health system capacity and protect healthcare workers to safely deliver equitable healthcare services**

#### 7.1 Therapeutics and Clinical Management

Considering the breadth of knowledge and evidence related to COVID-19, PAHO maintains an **interactive infographic** to help external partners navigate PAHO and WHO’s technical material and compilations of evidence from the Americas and around the globe.

The Organization worked with countries in the Region to promote the **WHO Global COVID-19 Clinical Data Platform** for the clinical characterization and management of hospitalized patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. This is part of a global strategy to gain a clearer understanding of the severity,
clinical features, and prognostic factors of COVID-19. The Platform has more than 400,000 cases, including more than 85,000 from the Region of the Americas, with contributions from the following countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and the United States of America.

PAHO last updated evidence for the Ongoing Living Update of Potential COVID-19 Therapeutics: Summary of rapid systematic reviews on 22 February 2022. The study synthesizes evidence on 178 therapeutics from 540 randomized controlled trials and observational studies.

7.2 Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs)

Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs) are invaluable when demands on a country’s health system exceed regular capacity. Updated information on deployed EMTs and alternative medical care sites (AMCS) throughout the Americas remained available at PAHO’s COVID-19 EMT Response information hub. As of 11 March 2022, there were at least 36 EMTs deployed throughout the Region, and 70 AMCS, such as military bases, sports stadiums, and fairgrounds managed by PAHO. These EMTs have added 2,951 inpatient hospital beds and 381 critical care beds throughout the Region.

Country
In Brazil, on 2 March 2022, PAHO reached a total of 13,970 healthcare workers trained in case management since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regional
The regional team continued to collaborate with regional, national, and international partners (including other UN agencies) on all matters related to procurement, shipping, freight, logistics and technical specifications for PPE, oxygen concentrators, in vitro diagnostic products (IVDs), and other goods, supplies, and equipment critical to the COVID-19 response in the Americas.

Considering the multitude of suppliers and concerns about the quality of procured goods, PAHO has made quality assurance a critical component of its technical support in the procurement of goods, supplies and equipment for COVID-19 response. This involves reviewing technical specifications, ensuring correct shipping documentation for customs clearance, and supporting countries with quality assurance issues. WHO issued adapted interim guidance on the rational use of PPE for COVID-19 as well as considerations during severe shortages.
8.1 PAHO Strategic Fund for Essential Medicines and Public Health Supplies

Established in 2000, the PAHO Strategic Fund (SF) supports Member States by ensuring the quality, safety, and efficacy of medicines and other health products; improving demand planning and capacity-strengthening for supply chain systems; sustainably reducing prices of critical medications and supplies through transparent international sourcing; and providing a line of credit option to facilitate Member State procurement.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the SF was rapidly mobilized to assess inventories across the Region and evaluate which medications had adequate safety stock and which needed to be prioritized, avoiding unnecessary expenses or late fees. The platform leveraged existing long-term agreements and relationships with suppliers to mitigate price inflation and better plan shipments/deliveries. The SF also coordinated alternative modes of transport (e.g., air freight versus ocean freight) to adapt to the most cost-effective and timely methods amidst continuously evolving COVID-19-related disruptions. This required direct negotiations with suppliers to absorb increases in freight costs on medicines. Finally, the SF worked with partners to support effective alternative treatment protocols to help adapt to limited supplies during COVID-19.

Since the start of the pandemic to 11 March 2022, the SF has procured more than $296 million worth of COVID-19 diagnostic tests (PCR and rapid tests), PPE and medicines for critical care, benefiting more than 39 million people throughout the Region of the Americas.1 The Fund continues to support the procurement of medicines and public health supplies for individuals affected by HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, diabetes, neglected tropical diseases, cardiovascular diseases, and hepatitis C. Learn more about the PAHO Strategic Fund’s essential work on the PAHO website.

Regional

PAHO provides continuous assistance to its Member States on regulatory preparedness to expedite processes for vaccine deployment. As part of the COVAX Facility’s allocation mechanism, support includes presenting information on technical documents required by Member States during bilateral and regional meetings.

Health technology assessments (HTAs) are invaluable guidance for health authorities in the use of technologies relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic. There are 402 COVID-19 related reports available in the Regional Database of HTA Reports of the Americas (BRISA).

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1 Sum of all Strategic Fund purchase orders placed to date. Occasionally, countries will withdraw or cancel orders, causing the figure to fluctuate from one report to the next.
The Organization collaborates with national regulatory authorities from across the Americas to share recommendations, considerations, and evaluations on products used to support COVID-19 patients and prevent transmission during the pandemic. Additionally, PAHO maintains a repository of websites and relevant information, including regulatory response on COVID-19, at the Regional Platform on Access and Innovation for Health Technologies (PRAIS).

**Country**

In **Bolivia**, during the reporting period, PAHO concluded a capacity-building initiative on the mhGAP Intervention Guide on mental health delivered to 60 health professionals from the Nor and Sur Yungas indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. In Sur and North Yungas, PAHO held capacity-building sessions aimed at community leaders on response to mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) needs during the COVID-19 pandemic in indigenous and Afro-descendant communities.

**Regional**

As of 11 March 2022, more than **1,713,622,142 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines** had been administered in the Americas, with more than **668 million people having completed their full vaccination schedule**. **51 countries and territories in the Region have begun vaccination**, with 33 of these having received vaccine doses through COVAX. Overall, PAHO has **distributed more than 119,705,080 million doses** to the Americas through COVAX. Additionally, PAHO continued to provide strategic direction to countries in the Region that are pending arrival of vaccines. More details are available on PAHO’s **COVID-19 Vaccination in the Americas database**, which reports on doses administered by country.

Successfully deploying vaccines for COVID-19 requires that countries have detailed plans, which factor in considerations ranging from regulatory and logistical issues to staff needs to ensuring equitable distribution, while targeting those most at risk of infection (e.g., frontline health workers, older persons, and those with underlying conditions).

PAHO is supporting countries throughout this process. **33 countries and territories** have completed their **national deployment and vaccination plans (NDVPs)**. **35 countries/territories** have completed the Vaccine Introduction Readiness Assessment Tool (VIRAT), which includes a dashboard that provides an overview of regional readiness. Regional support also includes work with countries interested in gaining access to vaccines through the COVAX Facility.

PAHO provides technical cooperation to countries seeking to access the COVID-19 vaccine through the COVAX Facility, including those selected for Advance Market Commitment (AMC) funding to cover their doses. This includes sharing recommendations with national authorities on steps to ensure that their NVDPs meet the necessary criteria to roll out vaccines to priority populations.

In addition to written guidance, PAHO also provides training webinars to its Member States. PAHO worked with Member States to develop workshops aimed at strengthening the Events Supposedly Attributable to
Vaccination or Immunization (ESAVI) surveillance in the Region of the Americas. Access the full list of past and future training sessions for all member states on PAHO’s website.

PAHO maintains a public dashboard that tracks the safety of various COVID-19 vaccines during and after clinical trials.

**Country**

In **Costa Rica**, on 2 March 2022, PAHO delivered a donation of **200,070 COVID-19 vaccines doses** through COVAX, bringing the total received through this Mechanism to 1,850,910. The doses received will support the country’s vaccination efforts to respond to the impact caused by the Omicron Variant of Concern.

In the **Dominican Republic**, on 1 March 2022, PAHO delivered a donation of **20 refrigerators** to the Ministry of Health’s Expanded Immunization Program (EIP) to help expand vaccine storage capacity in provincial collection centers prioritized by the country, with emphasis on border areas. The expansion improves access to vaccines in these territories. In April, the country is expecting two additional cold storage units for the national warehouse, helping to reduce gaps in the storage of COVID-19 vaccines, among others.

In **Mexico**, PAHO supported the procurement and delivery of 18,051,300 doses of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine through the COVAX Mechanism and PAHO’s Revolving Fund. On 28 February 2022, PAHO delivered **14,038,500 doses**, followed by 2,032,800 doses on 2 March and 1,980,000 doses on 4 March 2022.

In **Nicaragua**, **thirteen refrigerators have been donated through PAHO partnerships** to strengthen COVID-19 vaccine cold chain and storage capacity. The official delivery took place in Managua on 3 March 2022.