

COVID-19



PAHO

PAHO/WHO Response. 17 December 2021. Report n. 66

HIGHLIGHTS

PAHO participated in a **high-level event hosted by the President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia** on 10 December 2021 ahead of Universal Health Day, celebrated on 12 December. With 46% of countries in the Americas continuing to report disruptions in health service delivery due to the pandemic, PAHO's Director, Carissa F. Etienne, called for countries to urgently prioritize public investment to ensure resilient health systems that leave no one behind. Dr. Etienne said that maternal and child health, communicable diseases, routine immunization, and the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases are areas particularly impacted by the pandemic. The theme of Universal Health Day 2021 is 'Leave no one's health behind: invest in health systems for all,' the achievement of which is only possible through a primary health care approach which "provides us with the platform to deliver quality, comprehensive care to all," the Director urged. At the PAHO Directing Council in September 2021, Member States approved a strategy for building resilient health systems post-COVID-19, which includes four lines of action: transformation of health systems based on a primary health care approach; strengthening leadership, stewardship, and governance; strengthening capacities of health service delivery networks; and increasing and sustaining public financing in health and social protection. Dr. Etienne highlighted that adequate financing, a qualified workforce, increased primary health care services, access to health technologies, medicines, and information systems, and increased capacity for regional research and development should be the focus of countries as they work towards ensuring the development of resilient health care systems. "We must be better prepared. We must address pre-pandemic systemic deficiencies as a matter of priority," the Director concluded.

From 6 to 10 December 2021, PAHO convened the **10th Conference of the Pan American Network for Drug Regulatory Harmonization (PANDRH)**, which brought together national health and pharmaceutical regulatory authorities in the Region to discuss lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and how to tackle new challenges under the emerging global dynamics. The crucial role of national regulatory authorities (NRAs) in supporting access to vaccines and other medical products in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in the post-COVID-19 recovery era was a key topic discussed during the Conference. Responding to the lack of access to COVID-19 vaccines in the Region, PAHO and partners earlier this year launched a regional platform to boost vaccine production within the Region, focusing first on the mRNA technology used in some COVID-19 vaccines. NRAs are pivotal to any endeavor to increase access to life-saving drugs, as they oversee the safety, quality, and efficacy of all health technologies, including pharmaceuticals, vaccines, blood and blood products, and medical

SITUATION NUMBERS IN THE AMERICAS

as of 17 December 2021 (15:00)

56

Countries/territories affected

99,573,615

Confirmed cases

2,384,011

Deaths

1,410,645,142

Vaccine doses administered

RESPONSE PILLARS



1. Coordination, Planning, Financing, and Monitoring



2. Risk Communication, Community Engagement & Infodemic Management



3. Surveillance, Epidemiological Investigation, Contact Tracing; Adjustment of Public Health/Social Measures



4. Points of Entry, International Travel & Transport; Mass Gatherings



5. Laboratories & Diagnostics



6. Infection Prevention & Control; Protection of the Health Care Workforce



7. Case Management, Clinical Operations, & Therapeutics



8. Operational Support & Logistics; Supply Chain

9. Strengthening Essential Health Services & Systems

10. Vaccination

[Link to PAHO's technical and epidemiological reports, guidance, and recommendations](#)

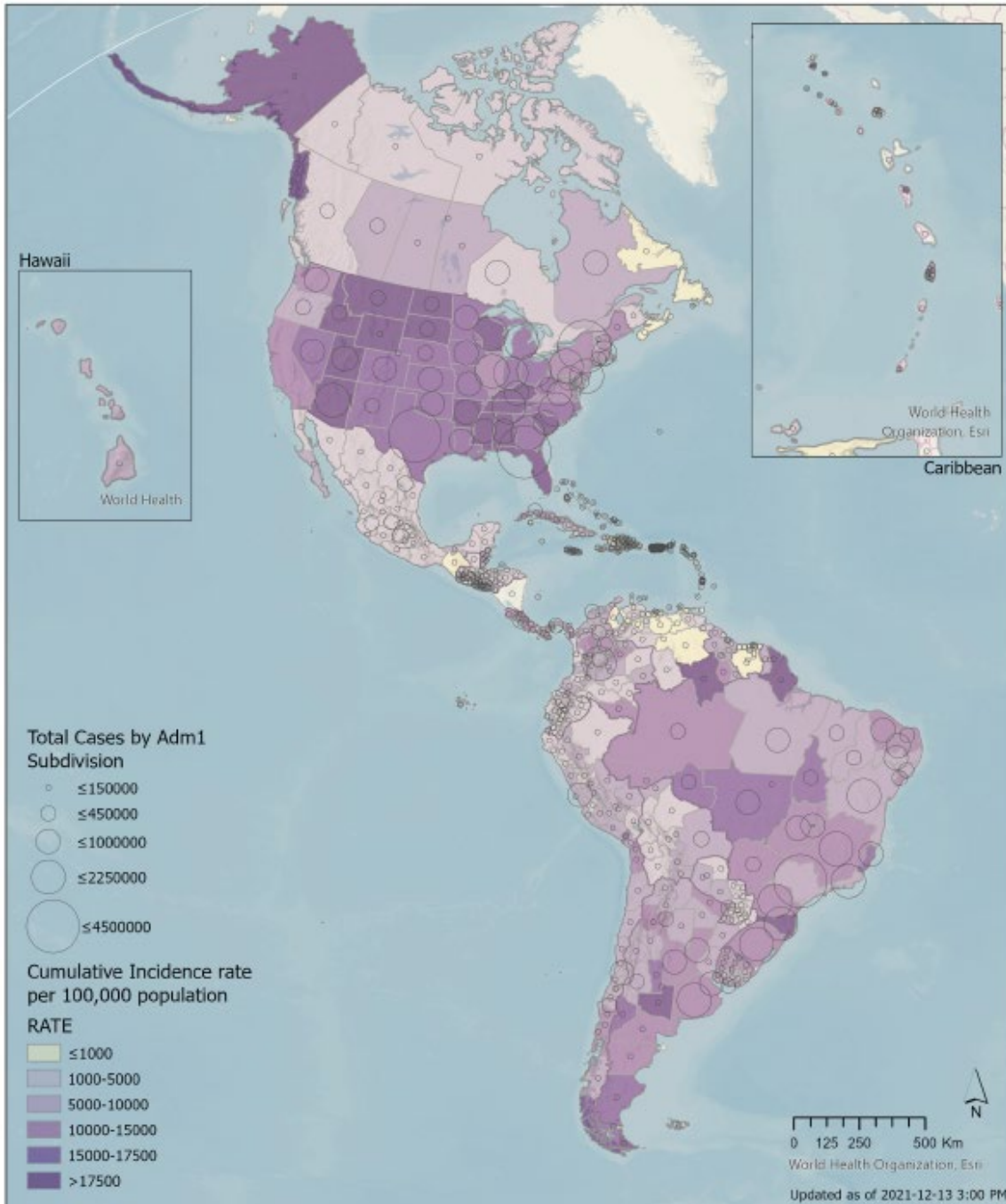
[Link to global operational situation reports](#)



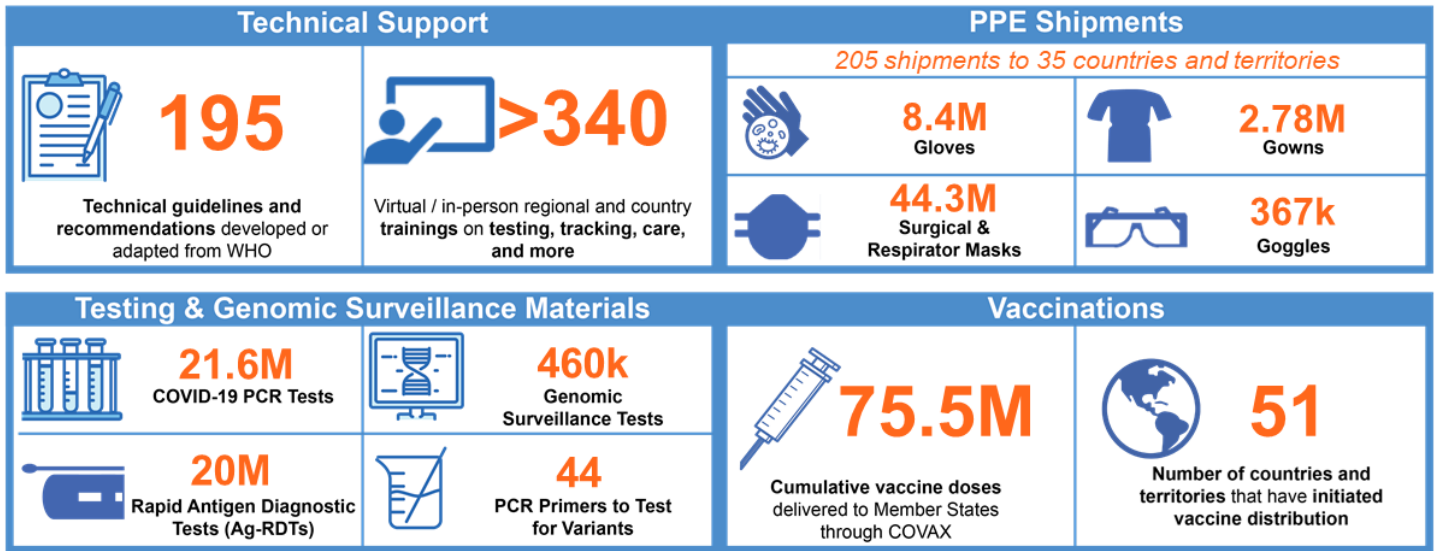
World Health Organization

devices. “Never in the history of public health in the Americas have the collective actions of national regulatory authorities and industry been so important,” said PAHO Director Carissa F. Etienne during her opening remarks. PAHO Assistant Director Jarbas Barbosa drew attention to the regulatory lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, which required the rapid authorization of medicines and other health technologies as well as strengthened market surveillance. Closing the conference, PAHO Deputy Director Mary Lou Valdez noted that “regulatory authorities have been central to the delivery of and access to much needed vaccines and supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic. These will remain critical as countries grapple with recovery and rebuilding efforts, including expanding manufacturing capacity in our own Region.”

Map 1. 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 13 December 2021



PAHO Regional Response Summary



Cumulative regional response data as of 17 December 2021.

PAHO/WHO Response (4 to 17 December 2021)

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 56 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.



PILLAR 1: Coordination, Planning, Financing, and Monitoring

Support activation and operation of national public health emergency management mechanisms, as well as COVID-19 planning and response, based on a whole-of-government and inclusive whole-of-society approach

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.

Since the beginning of January 2021 through 17 December 2021, a total of **1,914 bilateral communications** (under Article 44 of the International Health Regulations), between National Focal Points (NFPs) with information concerning cases/contacts and travel were received.

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.



PILLAR 2: Risk Communication, Community Engagement (RCCE)

Support participatory development and implementation of RCCE plans and dissemination of risk communication information to all populations and to travelers

COVID-19 Courses Available on PAHO's Virtual Campus for Public Health (SPA-POR)

[Introduction to the COVID-19 Vaccine: Guidance for Identifying Priority Groups and Developing Microplanning \(SPA\)](#)

[COVID-19 Vaccination Training for Healthcare Personnel – 2021 \(SPA, POR\)](#)

[Vaccination for COVID-19: technical protocols and procedures – Brazil 2021 \(POR\)](#)

[Occupational Health and Safety for Healthcare Professionals in the Context of COVID-19 – 2020 \(SPA, POR\)](#)

The full list of courses is available on the [PAHO website](#).

PAHO's Director Dr. Carissa F. Etienne delivered two press briefings during this period. **On 8 December 2021**, the Director emphasized that accelerating access to COVID-19 vaccines is an urgent priority in the face of new variants. With 20 countries in the Americas yet to reach the WHO's year-end vaccination target of 40%, and the Omicron variant detected in six countries at the time of the press conference, Dr. Etienne said that accelerating access to vaccines will be key to protecting populations, particularly the most vulnerable. Despite 55% of people in the Region being fully vaccinated, coverage in some countries such as Guatemala, Haiti, Jamaica, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines remains much lower. With 1.6 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines arriving in the Region this week and more expected to follow, "vulnerable groups like our indigenous peoples, the elderly and those with existing conditions that leave them at higher risk of severe COVID-19 should be first in line," the Director said. Dr. Etienne also highlighted the importance of ensuring long-term, sustainable access to vaccines, emphasizing the crucial role of PAHO's Revolving Fund – a vaccine procurement mechanism that has already secured more than US\$1 billion worth of all routine vaccines, including COVID-19, for the Region this year. "By using our Revolving Fund, countries are guaranteed access to quality-assured vaccines at fair prices through a transparent mechanism," the Director said. As the year draws to a close and countries deploy doses to reach the WHO's year-end targets, Dr. Etienne called for countries to prioritize and accelerate vaccine rollout to ensure no one is left behind.

On **15 December 2021**, the Director said that, while COVID-19 infections tripled in 2021, millions are now protected thanks to vaccines, but vaccine access gaps must urgently be addressed. "When we compare 2020 to 2021, this year was undoubtedly worse," with more than 98 million infections and 2.3 million lives lost, Dr. Etienne said. As the second year of the pandemic draws to a close, the Director called on the Region to employ all resources available to bring this virus under control, including vaccines, masks, social distancing, and surveillance. More than 1.3 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered in the

Americas, and 56% of people have been fully vaccinated. However, the Director highlighted that millions in the Region have not received a single dose stating that “Vaccine inequity continues to divide our Region and if we don’t address these glaring gaps, we’ll fail to bring this virus under control.” As we look forward to a new year and promising developments in COVID-19 therapeutics that may help treat the virus, curb hospitalizations, and prevent deaths, we should incorporate lessons learned from vaccine rollout. The Region has the “technical expertise, a well-established manufacturing capacity, strong regulatory infrastructure, and an effective pooled procurement mechanism via our Strategic Fund” that, if leveraged, will help us accelerate access to COVID-19 technologies, the Director highlighted. Collaboration across borders enabled vaccines to be developed in record-time, variants to be identified quickly, and countries to adjust responses based on the latest evidence. “Each time we worked together, we had breakthroughs,” Dr. Etienne said. “Sharing is central to defeating this pandemic.”

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.

During the reporting period, PAHO updated its webpage with [Questions and Answers on Variants of SARS-CoV-2](#), including information about the new Variant of Concern (VOC), Omicron. The page explains general concepts about the virus variants, as well as specific aspects about Omicron, including prevention measures and vaccine effectiveness.

Country

In **Colombia**, from 6 to 10 December 2021, PAHO continued to provide support for the delivery of risk communication workshops in the Chocó Department. Together with local territorial entities, PAHO coordinated activities for the events aimed at indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, staff from city halls, health professionals and journalists from local social media. The topics addressed included COVID-19 myth busting and vaccination.

In **Haiti**, PAHO provided technical and financial support for a meeting with community and civil society leaders in Caravelle. Held on 4 December 2021, the purpose of the meeting was to reinforce the participation of these leaders in the COVID-19 response in their communities, by among others, supporting health promotion activities conducted by the health districts and leveraging the available platforms and tools to share messages related to COVID-19.

In **Suriname**, as part of the support provided to the Ministry of Health in the implementation of their COVID-19 Risk Communication Plan, PAHO supported the production of eight edutainment videos, with COVID-19 topics presented in an accessible format and language. PAHO collaborated in the development of messages and scripts considering identified reasons for vaccine hesitancy, and provided the financial support to produce the videos.



PILLAR 3. Surveillance, Epidemiological Investigation, Contact Tracing, and Adjustment of Public Health & Social Measures

Strengthen the capacity of surveillance systems to detect COVID-19 cases, while ensuring continued surveillance of other diseases epidemic and pandemic potential

Regional

PAHO developed a **Geo-Hub** for the Region which includes a series of dashboards and epidemiological data updated daily. It has four sub-regional and 56 country/territory 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.

On 15 December 2021, PAHO published the **Regional risk assessment on vaccine-preventable diseases (diphtheria, measles, yellow fever, and polio) in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic: implications for the Region of the Americas**. The document analyses routine immunization activities in the Americas, which are still behind in most countries, considering the challenges posed to health systems by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Country

In **Colombia**, PAHO participated in the meeting of an interinstitutional working group to coordinate the development of the working plan to implement a pilot project to strengthen COVID-19 contact tracing with the use of Ag-RDTs. The working group met in the Municipality of Leticia, Department of Amazonas, on 9 and 10 December 2021. The project is part of the **FIND** initiative, the global alliance for diagnostics. PAHO

supported the identification of gaps and needs, and establishment of agreements and commitments between the different stakeholders, to develop the work plan and project timeline for implementation.



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 **21.6 million reactions/tests**. To date, PAHO has provided over 706,700 swabs and 365 sampling kits, among other critical materials.

PAHO continued to provide technical cooperation, including data review, troubleshooting sessions, and follow-up calls on laboratory diagnostics with teams from Brazil, Dominica, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Venezuela.

On 16 December 2021, PAHO coordinated the first module of a GISAID training workshop with GISAID directors in the Region. Delegates from the National Influenza Centers of more than 30 countries participated in the meeting. The **GISAID Initiative** promotes the rapid sharing of data from all influenza viruses and the coronavirus causing COVID-19. The training session reviewed basics for sequencing analysis, and quality assurance requirements to upload information in the database.

Country

On 15 December 2021, PAHO hosted a **webinar** on the factors that will continue to drive COVID-19 surges and the potential impact of the Delta and Omicron Variants of Concern (VOC). The event was primarily aimed at Ministry of Health officials, health care workers, social services providers and educators from **Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean Countries**. Objectives included discussing the factors contributing

to the increase in cases during and after the holiday season, as well as preventive steps to reduce the spread; providing information on the factors driving transmission of the new VOCs; discussing the impact of social mobility and social mixing and the importance of public health and social measures; strengthening health systems and services for the clinical management of patients with severe cases; and giving advice to countries on reassessing and revising national plans for COVID-19 for the new year based on the current situation.

In **Brazil**, PAHO visited the Sequencing Reference laboratory for PAHO Genomic Surveillance Network at Fundação Oswaldo Cruz (FIOCRUZ) on 16 December 2021. The purpose of the visit was to analyze the laboratory's capacity for genomic sequencing and to discuss strategies to enhance the collaboration and support of PAHO to the Network. PAHO also visited the genomic surveillance unit at Fundação Ezequiel Dias (FUNED), in the city of Belo Horizonte from 13 to 15 December 2021 for the same purpose.

During the week of 6 December 2021, PAHO held three sessions of a virtual theoretical training in PCR and COVID-19 laboratory-based surveillance for eight medical technologists from two laboratories in **Saint Kitts and Nevis**.

In **Suriname**, from 1 to 9 December 2021, PAHO supported hands-on training for the standardization of two Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) techniques for the molecular diagnosis of SARS-CoV-2 virus with the technical staff of the Central Laboratory in Paramaribo. PAHO also provided the PCR kits. The Central Laboratory now has the capacity to offer molecular diagnosis for COVID-19, thus expanding and strengthening COVID-19 surveillance and response in the country.

5.1 SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern

A number of SARS-CoV-2 variants have been identified through global genomic sequencing. Since the initial identification of SARS-CoV-2, until 17 December 2021, more than **6,217,087** complete genomic sequences have been shared globally through publicly accessible databases.

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 **44 unique primers** to detect genetic variants using PCR.

To date, **twenty-seven countries** are participating in the **COVID-19 Genomic Surveillance Network**, with reference sequencing laboratories in Bahamas, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Guyana, 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).



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.

During the week of 6 December 2021, PAHO provided online IPC training to the Council of Ministers of Health in Central America (COMISCA). Sessions addressed sterilization and disinfection of medical devices and included a total of 50 participants.



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

Regional

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 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 15 December 2021**. The study synthesizes evidence on 163 therapeutics from 483 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 17 December 2021, there were at least 100 EMTs deployed throughout the Region, and 129 Alternative

Medical Care Sites, such as military bases, sports stadiums, and fairgrounds managed by PAHO. These EMTs have added 6,899 inpatient hospital beds and 1,078 critical care beds throughout the Region.



PILLAR 8: Operational Support and Logistics (OSL), and Supply Chain

Establish and implement expedited procedures to facilitate the Organization's support to countries and territories response to COVID-19 healthcare services

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.

Country

In **Colombia**, during the week of 6 December 2021, PAHO coordinated with territorial entities to deliver COVID-19 rapid tests and personal protective equipment (PPE) in the city of Pasto, Nariño, including to the Nariño Departmental Health Institute. In the same period, PAHO delivered IT equipment to the Norte de Santander Department for the strengthening of the Expanded Immunization Program platform, PAIweb, mainly aimed at supporting its COVID-19 strategy. PAHO has also supported local management for the provision of PPE and technical activities for COVID-19 contact tracing in the Department.

In **Costa Rica**, on 9 December 2021, in collaboration with national institutions, PAHO conducted technical meetings to develop proposals for the strengthening of Medical Coordination and Information Cells (CICOM) and its integration with other national response mechanisms for emergency situations. CICOM is a tool used to coordinate requests for support from EMTs or Alternative Care Medical Sites (ACMS) in disaster situations in the Americas, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In **Guatemala** and **Honduras**, during the week of 13 December 2021, PAHO delivered the reports with survey results on the availability and supply of essential medicines. The purpose of these studies was to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health services disruption during 2021.

8.1 PAHO Revolving Fund for Essential Medicines and Strategic 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 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 17 December 2021, the SF has procured more than **\$279 million** worth of COVID-19 diagnostic tests (PCR and rapid tests), PPE and medicines for critical care, supporting more than **38 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.



PILLAR 9: Strengthening Essential Health Services and Systems

Support continued operation of equitable health systems based on Primary Health Care, to protect and sustain public health gains, investing in improved response capacity in the first level of care and the health service delivery networks, including the implementation of gender and culturally sensitive actions using human rights-based approaches, to overcome barriers to access, especially in populations in conditions of vulnerability.

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. As of 17 December 2021, there were **336 COVID-19 related reports available** in the [Regional Database of HTA Reports of the Americas \(BRISA\)](#).

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 \(PRAIS\)](#).

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.

Country



In **Belize**, on 15 December 2021, PAHO donated 175 posters on smoking and COVID-19 to the National Drug Abuse and Control Council (NDACC) of the Ministry of Health and Wellness (MOHW). These posters will be used by field officers to increase public awareness of the multiple risks of being infected with COVID-19 and smoking.

In **Colombia**, PAHO participated in missions to the cities of Guaranda and San Benito, including provision of logistical, administrative, and operational support. Missions were conducted from 10 to 14 December 2021 and provided general medical care, dental, and

psychological support, as well as the administration of COVID-19 vaccines. PAHO coordinated actions with the Health Departments, municipal health authorities, other local authorities, and support staff. A total of 458 people were seen during these missions.

In **Haiti**, on 8 and 9 December 2021, PAHO offered technical and financial support for a two-day workshop directed at the health personnel of the City of Croix-des-Bouquets in the Ouest Department. The goal of the workshop was to discuss strategies to foster the community and healthcare-based response to COVID-19 in Croix-des-Bouquets, and to build professional networks to improve the linkage between community health workers and primary health care workers.

In **Mexico**, PAHO and the Inter-American Social Security Conference (CISS) co-organized an international event to address the impact of COVID-19 on mental health. Held from 8 to 10 December 2021, the **International Congress on Mental Health** was also supported by the Inter-American Center for Social Security Studies (CIESS), the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS), and the Health Secretariat. PAHO also participated in specific discussion panels that shared the experiences from countries in the Americas, discussed the importance of incorporating mental health in primary health care and the health services network, as well as challenges posed by the pandemic.

In **Panamá**, on 6 December 2021, **PAHO presented the results of the project for strengthening capacities of the Union of Domestic Workers and Similar Activities (SINGRETRADS)** to provide its members with an effective response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their lives and well-being. The project was also carried out with the support of the Confederation of Workers of Panama. Among other actions, the project provided education and communication material on COVID-19 and on the management of the impact of the pandemic on mental health. It also included the collection of data and research, and resulted in the production of a **report that demonstrates the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on domestic work in Panama**. More than 100 domestic female workers attended the event.



Figure 2: Meeting of SINGRETRADS to present results of project to strengthen COVID-19 response to domestic workers in Panama. Source: PAHO.

PILLAR 10: Vaccination

Support the introduction, deployment, and evaluation of COVID-19 vaccines, ensuring their timely and equitable access, and strengthening vaccine safety surveillance.

Regional

As of 17 December 2021, more than **1.41 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines** had been administered in the Americas, with more than **607 million people having completed their full vaccination schedule**. All **51 countries and territories in the Region have begun vaccination**, 33 of these having received vaccine doses through COVAX. Overall, PAHO has **distributed more than 75.5 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** have completed their **national deployment and vaccination plans (NDVPs)**. **35 countries** have completed the Vaccine Introduction Readiness 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 NDVPs 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.

On 15 December 2021, PAHO published the Spanish version of the [Manual on Events Supposedly Attributable to Vaccination or Immunization \(ESAVI\) Surveillance in the Region of the Americas](#). The manual was adapted to the Region based on the Global Manual on Surveillance of Adverse Events Following Immunization, published by WHO in 2014. ESAVI surveillance aims to timely detect any adverse event occurring after vaccination, to control and classify risks related to vaccines, its manufacturing process, transportation, storage, administration, as well as any situation involving persons vaccinated, or to eliminate the relationship between events and vaccines.

Country

In **Ecuador**, on 6 December 2021, [PAHO delivered 1,976,400 COVID-19 vaccine doses through the COVAX Mechanism](#). The delivery is the last of a total of six, which have guaranteed 3,123,240 doses to the country throughout 2021. The coordination of vaccine delivery is carried out with resources managed by PAHO's Revolving Fund, which has historically supported the purchase of vaccines in the Region, and which now also supports the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to countries in the Americas.

Additionally, during the week of 13 December 2021, PAHO launched the mini post-introduction evaluation for the COVID-19 vaccine (mini-cPIE) and carried out an assessment on cold chain, supply chain operations, vaccine management and waste management with authorities from the Ministry of Health of **Ecuador**. The purpose of a post-introduction vaccine evaluation (PIE) is to evaluate the impact of the vaccine introduction on the country's immunization program and to rapidly identify any problems and challenges as vaccination expands in country.

In **Guatemala**, on 8 December 2021, [PAHO donated to the Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance \(MSPAS\) equipment to expand COVID-19 ultra-cold chain storage capacity](#). The donation included equipment such as ultra-low-temperature freezers and PPE and was delivered to the Immunizations Program (PI) of Guatemala's Centro Nacional de Biológicos (CNB).



Figure 3: Pfizer BioNTech vaccines are delivered to Nicaragua by PAHO through COVAX Mechanism. Source: PAHO.

In **Nicaragua**, on 13 December 2021, **PAHO delivered 827,190 Pfizer BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine doses through the COVAX Mechanism** to support the vaccination of pregnant women and women who are breastfeeding. With this delivery, PAHO together with COVAX, has delivered a total 3,943,060 vaccines to the country, which is implementing a robust vaccine deployment strategy that includes mass vaccination days and house-to-house immunization.

In **Uruguay**, **PAHO provided support for the establishment of a mobile vaccination unit**. The goal is to deliver COVID-19 vaccines to vulnerable population groups targeted by the National Vaccination Plan strategy and to maintain the country's high vaccination rates. The mobile unit was launched on 7 December 2021 in Montevideo.



Figure 4: Mobile vaccination unit starts operating in Montevideo to give COVID-19 vaccines to vulnerable populations in the country. Source: PAHO.

Gaps and Challenges

GAPS	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveillance systems: additional capacity-building and equipment for analysis. • Information systems: Data management systems are essential for case monitoring and contact tracing while protecting confidentiality. • Strategic planning and response: Countries need enough resources to implement national COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan and Risk Communication Plans. • Laboratory test kits and equipment: National laboratories need more extraction kits and other supplies to keep testing. • IPC supplies: PPEs and supplies (including for WASH) are urgently needed for isolation and quarantine wards. Healthcare workers are hesitant to work without PPE. • Health facility evaluations: Countries must undertake additional assessments to guide measures for infection prevention and control. • Resources for and access to populations in situations of vulnerability: PPE and other supplies are needed in these communities. Logistical challenges must be overcome to deliver these critical goods. • Risk communications: Key messages must be tailored to each country's context to resonate with intended audiences. • Subnational-level health workers: A surge in medical personnel is needed to ensure countries can serve their whole populations and obtain more epidemiological data as it becomes available. • Intensive care units: More ICUs will be needed to manage severe cases. • Migrant access to health services: Countries are assessing how to serve these populations and better manage outbreaks. • Private sector coordination: This is essential to ensure national protocols are followed. • Nutritional Guidance: This is vital to ensure families maintain nutritional health during and after the COVID-19 emergency. • Health Disaster Management Programs: Health Disaster Management Programs and surveillance were noted as priorities to enhance the COVID-19 and any other health emergency responses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equitable Vaccine Distribution: The shortage of available vaccines limits the ability of the countries to protect their populations. • Competitive marketplace: Countries and organizations are competing for limited supplies due to global shortages of PPE and other items. • Border closures: This has seriously hampered the deployment of experts, shipment of samples for testing, and procurement of supplies and equipment for testing, case management, and infection prevention and control. It has also added additional pressure to countries undergoing complex political and socio-economic transitions. • Managing infections in healthcare settings: Healthcare workers rely on PPE and other supplies to avoid infection. Global shortages are contributing to increasing cases and frontline workers losing their lives. • Infected healthcare workers: Infected health workers who are sick or quarantined will strain health systems. • Test availability: Epidemiological monitoring requires more testing. Counterfeit tests are creating risks in resources lost and incorrect analyses. • Health workforce limitations: Insufficient human resources hamper countries' efforts to conduct contact tracing and manage patients in quarantine. • Risk Communication: The perception of risk is still low in some countries/territories and many people ignore government public health measures. • Telephone referral systems: Some countries are reporting overwhelming call volumes. • Logistics systems: Many countries are still unprepared to manage the distribution of supplies and equipment. • Continuity in other health services: The pandemic has diverted resources from other critical services for programs such as HIV, TB, and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). • Stigma: Countries must take steps to reduce stigma towards persons returning from abroad and others associated with a higher likelihood of infection. • Public Compliance of Public Health Protocols: Public reluctance to follow public health protocols has led to increased infection rates in many countries in the Americas. • Variants: New COVID-19 strains present a challenge to the control of the disease.

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Support PAHO's efforts to fight COVID-19 in the Americas

The Region of the Americas has the highest cumulative number of COVID-19 cases and deaths.

PAHO is working with health professionals on the frontlines of this fight.

Vaccines will help save lives and eventually halt the pandemic.

Support PAHO's Response at:
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