

WHO troubled by 'near-exponential' growth of pandemic

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The World Health Organization said Wednesday it was deeply concerned about the near-exponential escalation of the new coronavirus pandemic, with the number of deaths doubling in a week.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus urged citizens around the globe to stand together to fight COVID-19, as he braced for the

millionth confirmed case.

"As we enter the fourth month since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, I am deeply concerned about the rapid escalation and global spread of infection," he told a virtual news conference.

"Over the past five weeks, we have witnessed a near exponential growth in the number of new cases, reaching almost every country.

"The [number](#) of deaths has more than doubled in the past week. In the next few days we will reach one million confirmed cases and 50,000 deaths."

Since emerging in China in December, COVID-19 has spread across the globe, claiming more than 43,000 lives, and infecting more than 860,000 people, according to an AFP tally of officially confirmed cases.

The coronavirus pandemic has killed more than 30,000 people in Europe alone. Italy and Spain account for three in every four deaths on the continent.

Debt relief call

However, the virus is expected to gain a greater foothold in parts of the world that have not, so far, seen such large numbers of cases and deaths.

"While relatively lower numbers of confirmed cases have been reported from Africa, and from Central and South America, we realise that COVID-19 could have serious social, economic and political consequences for these regions," Tedros warned.

"It is critical that we ensure these countries are well equipped to detect, test, isolate and treat COVID-19 cases, and identify contacts."

He urged governments to implement social welfare measures to ensure that [vulnerable people](#) have access to food during the crisis—and called for [debt relief](#) for poorer states.

"Many developing countries will struggle to implement social welfare programs of this nature. For those countries, debt relief is essential to enable them to take care of their people and avoid [economic collapse](#)," said Tedros.

He said there were many "unknowns" about how COVID-19 will behave, as it is the "first-ever coronavirus pandemic in the world".

A safe vaccine is thought to be 12 to 18 months away, while WHO emergencies director Michael Ryan stressed: "There is no therapy that has been proven to be effective in the treatment of COVID-19."

As regards the use of face masks, the WHO recommends that those people who are infected and health workers who care for them should use medical masks.

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