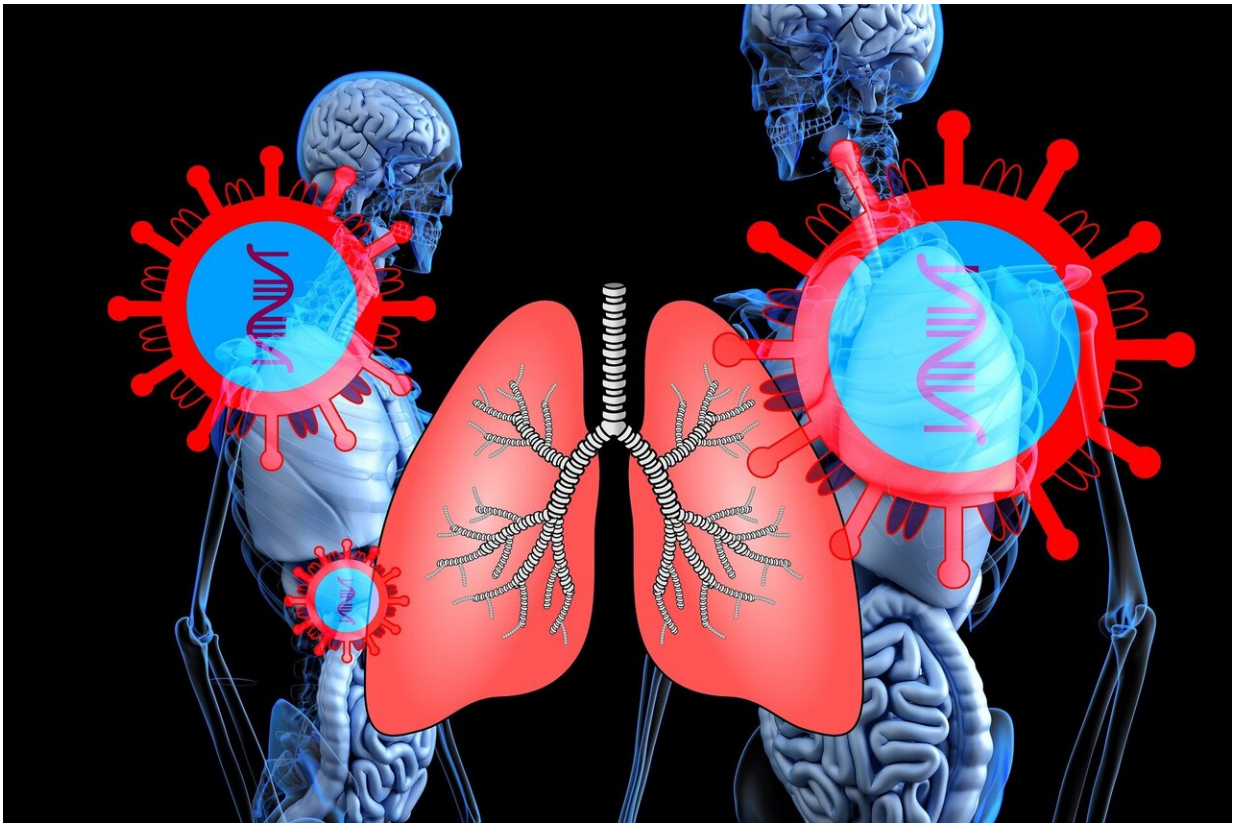


Careless young people driving some COVID-19 spikes: WHO

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The World Health Organization on Thursday warned that spikes in coronavirus transmission in a number of countries were being driven by young people "letting down their guard".

"Young people are not invincible," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a virtual news conference in Geneva.

While the pandemic, which has killed nearly 670,000 and infected more than 17 million people worldwide, has disproportionately impacted the elderly and people with pre-existing conditions, he stressed that "younger people are at risk too".

"Young people can be infected, young people can die, and young people can transmit the virus to others."

Tedros lamented that a major challenge in trying to rein in the novel coronavirus was "convincing younger people of this risk".

He pointed to evidence that "spikes of cases in some countries are being driven in part by younger people letting down their guard during the northern hemisphere summer".

"Young people must take the same precautions to protect themselves and protect others as everyone else," he insisted.

WHO's technical lead for COVID-19 Maria Van Kerkhove lamented in particular that nightclubs in a number of places had become "amplifiers" of transmission.

"We are asking for all people, including young people, to be your own risk manager" and avoid behaviours that could easily increase transmission of the disease.

Long term impacts

Michael Ryan, WHO's emergencies director, also stressed that very little is still known about the long term effects of even mild COVID-19

infections.

"This disease while it may be mild, it may be moderate, it can affect many organs," he told Thursday's briefing.

"We just don't know what the long-term impact of those infections will be," he said, pointing to a study in Germany following COVID-19 patients who were never admitted to hospital, which hinted the long-term impacts could be serious.

MRI scans of their hearts had found shown "profound changes, inflammatory changes in the cardiac linings of the heart and the cardiac muscles," he said.

While those issues will likely pass for most patients once the virus is out of their system, he warned that "inflammatory responses can also in themselves do damage and they can do long-term damage".

"Any inflammatory process in the cardiovascular system can lead to longer term heart disease and can actually accelerate other chronic heart conditions that may develop much later in life," he pointed out.

"We just don't know... Why take the risk?"

Young people, he warned, should of course try to rein in transmission as an altruistic act to avoid spreading the virus to more vulnerable groups, he said, but they should also do so out of consideration for their own health.

"Play it safe," he said.

"Use your brain... Don't take a risk that you cannot quantify."

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