

COVID-19 death toll unacceptably high: WHO

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The COVID-19 weekly death toll of around 50,000 lives is unacceptably high, the World Health Organization said Friday as the one million fatalities landmark approaches.

The WHO said that although global [death](#) and infection rates from the new [coronavirus](#) were plateauing rather than rising exponentially, the worldwide figures were masking surges at lower regional and local levels.

The respiratory disease has killed nearly 947,000 people since the outbreak emerged in China last December, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP, while more than 30.2 million cases have been registered.

"We're adding about 1.8 to two million cases per week to the global case count, and an average somewhere between 40,000 to 50,000 deaths," WHO emergencies director Michael Ryan told a virtual news conference.

"Thankfully that is not rising exponentially. This is a hugely high figure to be settling at. That is not where we want to be.

"Even though those numbers are flat at a global level, that covers up the fact that at regional and sub-regional level in some countries, we're seeing significant rises in cases."

Ryan said the pandemic still had a "long way to burn" and though the proportion of infected people dying had dropped as treatment techniques improved, "we cannot accept 50,000 deaths a week as an acceptable number".

Worrying trends

Large parts of Europe on Friday geared up for broad new restrictions to stop the coronavirus and Israel enforced a second nationwide shutdown.

Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO's technical lead on COVID-19, said the

UN health agency was seeing "worrying trends in the [northern hemisphere](#)" in terms of case numbers, hospitalisations and intensive care admissions, "and we haven't even begun the influenza season yet".

"The circulation of other respiratory pathogens will complicate the clinical picture," she added.

And while the world waits for a vaccine—36 are currently being trialled on humans—the American said some countries had learned throughout the pandemic that they could get on top of the virus with the measures already available.

"As we approach 30 million cases and one million deaths, we have a long way to go," she said.

"But we are in a different place that we were in in January.

"We know so much more now, and countries are showing us that they can use the tools they have now to break chains of transmission and save lives."

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus meanwhile lamented the recurring pattern of money being thrown at virus outbreaks—only after the event.

"COVID-19 has shown that collectively, the world was woefully under-prepared," he said.

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