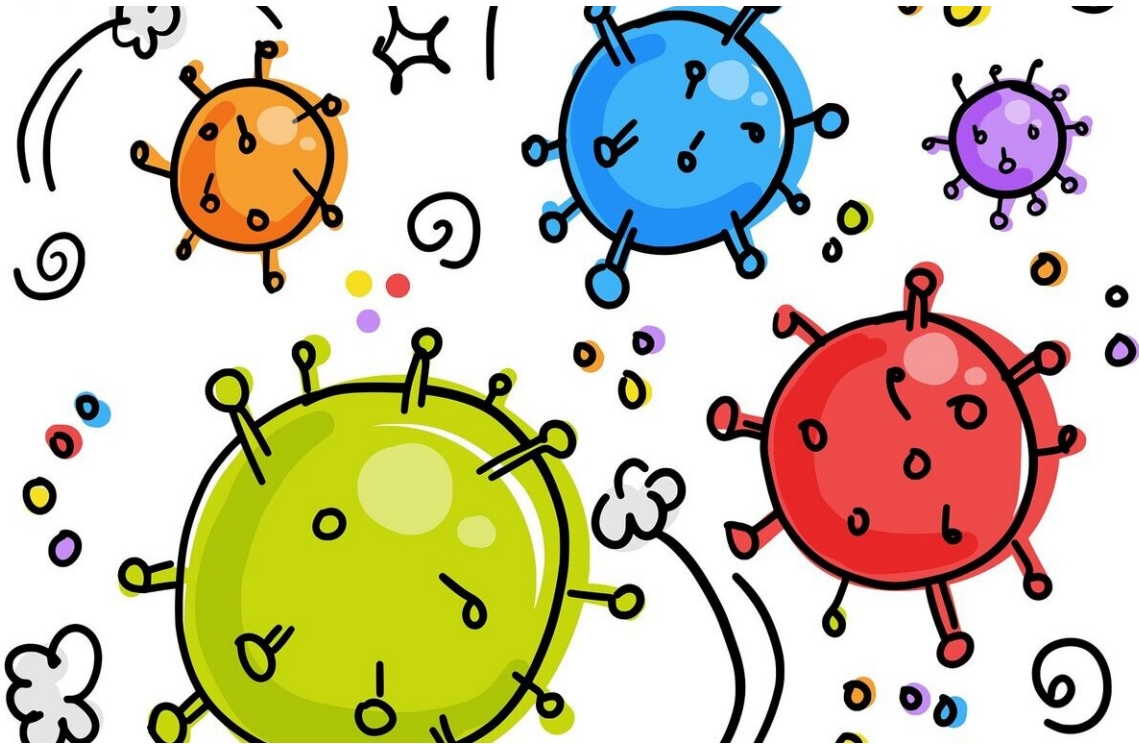


Africa not ready for imminent third coronavirus wave: WHO

June 3 2021



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Hit by a fresh surge of infections and with vaccine deliveries at a near standstill, Africa is not ready to face a third wave of the pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned Thursday.

"Many African hospitals and clinics are still far from ready to cope with

a huge rise in critically-ill patients," warned WHO regional director for Africa, Dr. Matshidiso Moeti.

"The threat of a third wave in Africa is real and rising," she added in a virtual briefing.

Africa has officially registered over 4.8 million cases and 130,000 deaths, according to the WHO, representing 2.9 percent of global cases and 3.7 percent of deaths.

According to a survey conducted by the organisation in May, the essential health facilities and personnel required to manage critically ill COVID-19 patients are grossly inadequate in many African countries.

Of 23 countries surveyed, most had less than one intensive care unit bed per 100,000 population and only one-third had mechanical ventilators.

In comparison, countries like Germany and the United States have more than 25 beds per 100,000 people.

"Treatment is the last line of defence against this virus and we cannot let it be breached," Moeti stressed, calling for better equipment for hospital and medical staff.

In recent weeks, the continent has seen a rise in infections.

South Africa, officially the most affected country on the continent, has tightened health restrictions and now has more than 1.6 million cases and 56,439 deaths.

In Uganda, the number of cases has jumped 131 percent in one week with outbreaks in schools and an increase in cases among health workers.

The UN's health agency on Thursday said it had detected a surge late last month in coronavirus cases in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Angola and Namibia are also seeing a resurgence.

Simultaneously, the continent is facing a shortage of vaccines and deliveries are almost at a standstill in Africa, according to WHO, which hopes for new deliveries in the coming months through the international Covax scheme, including a pledge of 80 million doses from the United States.

Only 2 percent of Africans to date have received at least one vaccine jab, while 24 percent of the world's population is now vaccinated.

Six countries have not kicked off inoculation, four of which are in Africa: Tanzania, Burundi, Chad and Eritrea.

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