

WHO: COVID-19 vaccination triples in Africa but still low

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A man receives his second coronavirus vaccination, the Moderna vaccine, at the health center in Lagos, Nigeria Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021. Nigeria has begun the second rollout of COVID-19 vaccines as it aims to protect its population of more than 200 million amid an infection surge in a third wave of the pandemic. Credit: AP Photo/Sunday Alamba

COVID-19 vaccinations in Africa tripled over the past week, though protecting even 10% of the continent by the end of September remains "a very daunting task," the Africa director of the World Health Organization said Thursday.

Meanwhile, the continent saw 248,000 new confirmed cases over the past week, with at least 24 countries seeing a surge in infections driven by the delta variant.

"This is a preventable tragedy if African countries can get fair access to the vaccines," Matshidiso Moeti told reporters.

The WHO Africa director said 13 million doses were administered in the past week, three times more than the number of shots given in the previous week as donations of doses increased from developed countries. But that remains a drop in an ocean on the continent home to 1.3 billion people, where the Africa CDC says only 2.4% are currently vaccinated.

Africa's brutal resurgence driven by the delta variant is further stretching already strained health systems across the continent. As African countries struggle, the United States and other high-income countries are talking about booster shots.

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus recently said it was "unconscionable" that some countries are now offering booster shots "while so many people remain unprotected."



A nurse carries a box containing Moderna vaccines at the health center in Lagos, Nigeria Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021. Nigeria has begun the second rollout of COVID-19 vaccines as it aims to protect its population of more than 200 million amid an infection surge in a third wave of the pandemic. Credit: AP Photo/Sunday Alamba



A nurse prepares the Moderna coronavirus vaccine at the health center in Lagos, Nigeria Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021. Nigeria has begun the second rollout of COVID-19 vaccines as it aims to protect its population of more than 200 million amid an infection surge in a third wave of the pandemic. Credit: AP Photo/Sunday Alamba



People wait to take the Moderna coronavirus vaccine at the health center in Lagos, Nigeria Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021. Nigeria has begun the second rollout of COVID-19 vaccines as it aims to protect its population of more than 200 million amid an infection surge in a third wave of the pandemic. Credit: AP Photo/Sunday Alamba



People are screened before taking the Moderna coronavirus vaccine at the health center in Lagos, Nigeria Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021. Nigeria has begun the second rollout of COVID-19 vaccines as it aims to protect its population of more than 200 million amid an infection surge in a third wave of the pandemic. Credit: AP Photo/Sunday Alamba



A nurse in protective gear, center, takes temperature of people waiting to take the Moderna coronavirus vaccine at the health center in Lagos, Nigeria Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021. Nigeria has begun the second rollout of COVID-19 vaccines as it aims to protect its population of more than 200 million amid an infection surge in a third wave of the pandemic. Credit: AP Photo/Sunday Alamba

"I think it is very difficult for us to talk about booster doses in Africa," Moeti said Thursday. "We have not covered even 5% of the population yet with the initial vaccinations that are needed to slow down the spread of the virus and most importantly, stop what we think might be a fourth wave which is coming."

Africa will receive 117 million doses in coming months but an additional 34 million will be needed to reach the 10% vaccination target, the WHO

Africa director added.

Beyond that, though, Moeti urged African countries to ramp up their readiness to utilize vaccines when they arrive. "No precious dose should be wasted," she said.

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