Spiraling infections grip low-vaccination parts of Europe

November 4 2021, by Darko Bandic

People wait to be vaccinated against COVID-19 in Zagreb, Croatia, Thursday, Nov. 4, 2021. Countries throughout Central and Eastern Europe reported spiraling coronavirus cases Thursday, with several hitting new daily records in the regions that have lower vaccination rates than the rest of the continent. Croatia, Slovenia and Slovakia reported their highest numbers of daily cases of the pandemic, while other countries registered the most infections in months. Credit: AP Photo/Darko Bandic

Central and Eastern Europe grappled with spiraling coronavirus cases on Thursday with several countries hitting new daily records in the regions, which have lower vaccination rates than the rest of the continent.

Ukraine, Croatia, Slovenia and Slovakia reported their highest ever numbers of daily cases, while other countries registered the most infections in months.

Most Central and Eastern European countries have vaccinated about half of their populations or less, which is lower than the European Union average of some 75%.

Anti-virus restrictions have also varied as governments sought to boost vaccination rates rather than reimpose lockdowns and other strict measures that are widely unpopular and could hurt the economy.

In Croatia, authorities reported a record daily high of 6,310 new cases and 32 deaths. Doctors warned that pressure on hospitals was rising in the country of 4.2 million.

Croatian officials said they will announce wider use of COVID passes on Friday but no lockdown. Authorities also ordered an extension of intensive and emergency care capacity.

"The best measure against the virus remains vaccination," Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said.

Alarmed by the surge, many Croats rushed to vaccination points in the capital Zagreb to get jabbed, or receive booster shots.

In neighboring Slovenia, the official STA news agency said hospitals were filling up fast, and a new record of 4,511 daily infections was reported Thursday.

Hospitals in the nation of 2 million already have scrapped non-urgent interventions to make space for COVID-19 patients. The country has introduced COVID-19 passes for the working population but the government has said surging infections could force a lockdown.

People wait to be vaccinated against COVID-19 in Zagreb, Croatia, Thursday, Nov. 4, 2021. Countries throughout Central and Eastern Europe reported spiraling coronavirus cases Thursday, with several hitting new daily records in the regions that have lower vaccination rates than the rest of the continent. Croatia, Slovenia and Slovakia reported their highest numbers of daily cases of the pandemic, while other countries registered the most infections in months. Credit: AP Photo/Darko Bandic

Jelko Kacin, the pandemic response coordinator, described the situation as "a dictatorship of a minority of the unvaccinated and irresponsible over the majority who have been vaccinated on time and who are complying with the measures," STA reported. He announced tightening of COVID pass rules.

Serbia's government pandemic crisis team was meeting Thursday as medical experts urged a 10-day lockdown and requiring COVID passes for all indoor venues rather than only to enter restaurants and bars after 10 p.m., which is the case now.

Serbia's populist government has been reluctant to tighten pandemic regulations, focusing on getting more people vaccinated. In Serbia, as in Slovenia, vaccination rates are just over 50%.

The Balkan nation of 7 million has reported more than 1 million cases and over 10,000 deaths so far. Some 6,100 new cases were recorded on Thursday, while 64 people died. Serbian doctors in the past weeks have said that even small babies were among the patients on artificial ventilation.

In North Macedonia, authorities said they were doing virus testing in schools after three teenage girls died recently of COVID-19.

North Macedonia's vaccination rate stood at 39% of the 2 million people—among the lowest in Europe, along with Ukraine with just 17% vaccinated people among the population of 41 million.

Ukraine's Health Ministry on Thursday reported 27,377 new infections, about 500 more than the previous high tallied last week. Ukraine has faced protests against vaccination certificates for teachers and other public employees, as well as for passengers on airplanes, trains and buses.

Slovakia also reported a record of 6,713 new infections on Thursday. Slovakia has one of the lowest COVID-19 inoculation rates in the EU, with slightly more than 2.4 million people in the nation of 5.4 million fully vaccinated.

The government said it would extend already tight restrictions to almost half of the country next week. Starting Monday, 36 of the country's 79 counties will need to close hotels, bars, restaurants, and fitness, wellness and aquatic centers.

Public gatherings in those counties will be limited to 100 fully vaccinated people. Face coverings will become mandatory both indoors and outdoors.

People wait to be vaccinated against COVID-19 in Zagreb, Croatia, Thursday, Nov. 4, 2021. Countries throughout Central and Eastern Europe reported spiraling coronavirus cases Thursday, with several hitting new daily records in the regions that have lower vaccination rates than the rest of the continent. Croatia, Slovenia and Slovakia reported their highest numbers of daily cases of the pandemic, while other countries registered the most infections in months. Credit: AP Photo/Darko Bandic

In the neighboring Czech Republic, the day-to-day increase reached more than 9,000 cases for the second day on Wednesday, the highest numbers since March. The number of hospitalized people has rocketed.

"We're in a quite serious situation," Health Minister Adam Vojtech said Thursday. "The only solution ... is vaccination."

Cases also are rising in Poland and Hungary, while a weeks-long surge persisted in Bulgaria.

Poland reported more than 15,000 new cases in the nation of 38 million, and 250 deaths, numbers last seen in April. Nearly 53% of Poland's population is fully vaccinated.

Hungary said 107 people died from COVID-19 between Wednesday and Thursday, the highest daily total since May 5. Authorities confirmed 6,268 new infections, roughly 2.5 times more than last Thursday.

Bulgaria on Thursday reported 4,922 new cases, and authorities said 86% involved unvaccinated people. Only 28.5% of Bulgaria's population of 7 million has been fully vaccinated.

After battling a major outbreak for weeks, doctors in Romania said they were exhausted and finding it hard to cope with both full hospitals and

anti-vaccination propaganda.

Cristian Oancea, a physician at Victor Babes Hospital for Infectious Diseases in Timisoara, told The Associated Press Thursday that many unvaccinated patients regret not getting jabbed when they find themselves in hospital beds.

He said they tell him: "I'm a fool for not getting vaccinated."

Citation: Spiraling infections grip low-vaccination parts of Europe (2021, November 4) retrieved 1 May 2024 from
https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-11-spiraling-infections-low-vaccination-europe.html