

Omicron pushing Covid out of pandemic phase: EU agency

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The spread of the Omicron variant is pushing COVID towards being an endemic disease that humanity can live with, although it remains a pandemic for now, the EU's drug watchdog said Tuesday.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) also expressed doubts about giving a fourth vaccine shot to the [general population](#), saying repeated boosters were not a "sustainable" [strategy](#).

"Nobody knows exactly when we will be at the end of the tunnel but we will be there," Marco Cavaleri, head of vaccine strategy at the Amsterdam-based regulator, told journalists.

"With the increase of immunity in population—and with Omicron, there will be a lot of natural immunity taking place on top of vaccination—we will be fast moving towards a scenario that will be closer to endemicity," he added.

But he stressed that "we should not forget we are still in a pandemic", noting the huge burden on healthcare from the surge in Omicron.

The World Health Organization said earlier Tuesday that more than half of people in Europe were on track to catch the [variant](#) in the next two months.

The WHO also warned that repeated COVID boosters were not a viable strategy, comments the EU's medicines regulator echoed.

"If we have a strategy in which we give boosters every four months, we will end up potentially having problems with [immune response](#)," the EMA's Cavaleri said.

"And secondly of course there is the risk of fatigue in the population with continuous administration of boosters."

Countries should instead start thinking about spacing out boosters at longer intervals, and synchronising them with the start of the cold season in the way that flu vaccines are currently administered, Cavaleri said.

The EMA separately said that studies had confirmed that despite being more infectious, the risk of hospitalisation from the Omicron variant was between one third and one half of that posed by the Delta strain.

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