

# WHO: New COVID cases fall for the 3rd week, deaths also drop

February 22 2022

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A man holding his bicycle with a school bag on it gets a throat swab during a mass COVID-19 test at a residential compound in Wuhan in central China's Hubei province, Tuesday, Feb. 22, 2022. Wuhan, the first major outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic has reported more than dozen new coronavirus cases this week, prompting the authority to step up precautions measures. Credit: Chinatopix via AP

The number of new coronavirus cases around the world fell 21% in the last week, marking the third consecutive week that COVID-19 cases have dropped, the World Health Organization said Tuesday.

In the U.N. health agency's weekly pandemic report, WHO said there were more than 12 million new coronavirus infections last week. The [number](#) of new COVID-19 deaths fell 8% to about 67,000 worldwide, the first time that weekly deaths have fallen since early January.

The Western Pacific was the only region that saw an increase in COVID-19 cases, with a 29% jump, while the number of infections elsewhere dropped significantly. The number of new deaths also rose in the Western Pacific and Africa while falling everywhere else. The highest number of new COVID-19 cases were seen in Russia, Germany, Brazil, the U.S. and South Korea.

WHO said [omicron](#) remains the overwhelmingly dominant [variant](#) worldwide, accounting for more than 99% of sequences shared with the world's biggest virus database. It said delta was the only other variant of significance, which comprised fewer than 1% of shared sequences.

WHO also reported that available vaccine evidence shows that "booster vaccination substantially improves (vaccine effectiveness)," against the omicron variant, but said more details are still needed on how long such protection lasts.

The agency had previously said there was no proof that boosters were necessary for healthy people and pleaded with [rich countries](#) not to offer third doses to their people before sharing them with [poorer countries](#).

Health officials have noted that omicron causes milder disease than previous COVID-19 variants and in countries with high vaccination rates, omicron has spread widely but COVID-19 hospitalization and

death rates have not increased substantially.

Scientists, however, warn that it's still possible that more transmissible and deadly variants of COVID-19 could still emerge if the virus is allowed to spread uncontrolled.

WHO's Europe chief Dr. Hans Kluge says the region is now entering a "plausible endgame" for the virus and said there is now a "singular opportunity" for authorities to end the acute phase of the pandemic.

This week, [Britain](#) announced it would scrap all remaining COVID-19 restrictions, including the requirement for people with the illness to self-isolate, even as Prime Minister Boris Johnson acknowledged there could be future deadly variants of the virus. Earlier this month, [Sweden](#) abandoned wide-scale testing for COVID-19 even in people with symptoms, saying that testing costs and the expense of its pandemic restrictions were "no longer justifiable."

Hong Kong's leader, meanwhile, announced Tuesday that the city will test its entire population of 7.5 million people for COVID-19 three times in March as it grapples with its worst outbreak yet, driven by the highly contagious omicron variant.

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Citation: WHO: New COVID cases fall for the 3rd week, deaths also drop (2022, February 22) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-02-covid-cases-fall-3rd-week.html>

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