

WHO: New COVID cases drop by 19% globally, deaths stable

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A household tool vendor wearing a face mask to protect against the coronavirus waits for customers at a convenience store in a traditional market in Tangerang, Indonesia, Wednesday, Feb. 16, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Tatan Syuflana

The number of new coronavirus cases globally fell by 19% in the last

week while the number of deaths remained stable, according to the World Health Organization.

The U.N. health agency said late Tuesday in its weekly report on the pandemic that just over 16 million new COVID-19 infections and about 75,000 deaths were reported worldwide last week.

The Western Pacific was the only region to report a rise in new weekly cases, an increase of about 19%, Southeast Asia reported a decrease of about 37%, the biggest drop globally. The number of deaths rose by 38% in the Middle East and by about one-third in the Western Pacific.

The biggest number of new COVID-19 cases was seen in Russia. Cases there and elsewhere in Eastern Europe doubled in recent weeks, driven by a surge of the hugely infectious [omicron](#) variant.

WHO said that all other coronavirus variants, including alpha, beta and delta, continue to decline globally as omicron crowds them out. Among the more than 400,000 COVID-19 virus sequences uploaded to the world's biggest virus database in the last week, more than 98% were omicron.

WHO said the BA.2 version of omicron appears to be "steadily increasing" and its prevalence has risen in South Africa, Denmark, the U.K. and other countries.

Health officials have noted, however, that omicron causes milder disease than previous COVID-19 variants and in countries with [high vaccination rates](#), hospitalization and [death rates](#) have not increased substantially, even with omicron's spread.

WHO's Africa director, Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, said last week there was "light at the end of the tunnel" for the continent and that even despite

low vaccination rates, Africa was transitioning from the acute pandemic phase of COVID-19.

That optimism contrasts sharply with warnings from WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who has said repeatedly the pandemic is not over and is premature for countries to think that the end might be imminent.

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