

EU warily sees 'stabilization' of COVID wave

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The European Union is cautiously welcoming a "stabilization" of the latest wave of the coronavirus pandemic but knows it must do more to help poorer nations, especially in Africa with jobs, officials said Wednesday.

"Saying that we have turned the corner... is not a phrase that at least I would use," EU health commissioner Stella Kyriakides told reporters while attending a joint meeting of EU health and foreign ministers in Lyon, France.

"We are seeing in the last seven to eight weeks a stabilization in the number of hospitalizations and mortality... and we are seeing in some member states that they have reached the peak with the Omicron strain of the virus," she said.

But, she added, "we need to continue to be cautious," given the curveballs the coronavirus and its successive variants have thrown over the past two years.

Italy's health minister, Roberto Speranza, echoed the wariness—saying "the game is not closed"—but said that "all European countries are moving towards the management of a new phase" of the pandemic.

The Lyon meeting on Europe's response to the pandemic was the first time the bloc's foreign and [health](#) ministers got together to discuss the shared action taken.

Much of their discussion was on what can be done to further help countries still trailing far behind the EU's 72% full vaccination rate.

Africa was especially in focus in the talks—held one week before an EU-Africa Union summit to be held in Brussels.

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen emphasized during a visit to Senegal on Wednesday that the EU had so far shared nearly 145 million COVID vaccine doses with Africa, and planned to triple that figure by mid-June.

She also announced the EU was giving an extra 125 million euros (\$143 million) to Africa, on top of nearly 300 million euros already donated, to help distribute doses, train medical staff and boost virus genome sequencing.

"Health has become a geopolitical issue," French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told a media conference during the Lyon meeting. France currently holds the EU's rotating presidency.

"We need to strengthen this solidarity and we need to strengthen [health systems](#)," he said.

Omicron is now the dominant variant in most of Europe.

Several EU countries, such as France, Spain, Italy and Belgium, are seeing case numbers fall, suggesting they have passed their peak of the current wave.

Others, though, including Germany, the Netherlands and Slovakia, are seeing cases rise, or at least plateauing at a stubborn level.

COVID death rates overall are far lower, proportionally, than in earlier waves—a trend attributed to vaccinations. However they are ticking up in most EU countries.

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