

COVID-19 cases, deaths continue to drop globally, WHO says

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Elderly couple and medical staff walk out from the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Hong Kong, Wednesday, March 9, 2022. Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said Wednesday that there is "no specific time frame" for the testing exercise, as authorities focused their efforts on reducing the number of COVID-related deaths in the city during its worst outbreak to date. Credit: AP Photo/Kin Cheung

The number of new coronavirus cases and deaths globally have continued to fall in the past week, the World Health Organization said Wednesday, with only the Western Pacific reporting an increase in COVID-19.

In its latest report on the pandemic issued on Wednesday, the U.N. health agency said new COVID-19 infections dropped by 5% in the last week, continuing a declining trend that started more than a month ago. Deaths were also down by 8% and have been falling globally for the last two weeks.

Only the Western Pacific saw a rise in coronavirus cases, reporting a 46% increase. In the last week, Hong Kong has been recording about 150 deaths per day, giving it the world's highest [death](#) rate per 1 million people, according to data from Oxford University.

The highly infectious [omicron](#) variant has recently overwhelmed the semi-autonomous Chinese city, prompting mass quarantines, supermarket panic buying and even the city's morgues are overflowing, forcing authorities to store bodies in refrigerated shipping containers.

Elsewhere, COVID-19 is falling significantly; the biggest declines were seen in the Middle East and Africa, where cases dropped by 46% and 40%, respectively.

"The mildness of the omicron wave, its low death toll and the fact that it is rapidly disappearing, has created the widespread impression that COVID-19 is over," said Salim Abdool Karim of the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. He said it's still unclear when the pandemic might end, but said the low death toll during the omicron surge was striking.

Many scientists have credited that to the [booster](#) immunization programs

undertaken in numerous rich countries, which have broken the connection between COVID-19 infection and [severe disease](#).

Earlier this week, an expert group convened by WHO said it "strongly supports urgent and broad access" to booster doses of COVID-19 vaccine amid the global spread of omicron, capping a [reversal](#) of the U.N. agency's repeated insistence last year that boosters weren't necessary for healthy people.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus pleaded with rich countries not to offer boosters and to send doses to Africa instead, saying there was no scientific justification to warrant boosters for healthy people.

Numerous scientific studies have since proven that booster doses of authorized vaccines help restore waning immunity and protect against serious COVID-19, especially amid the global spread of omicron.

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