Medical Xpress
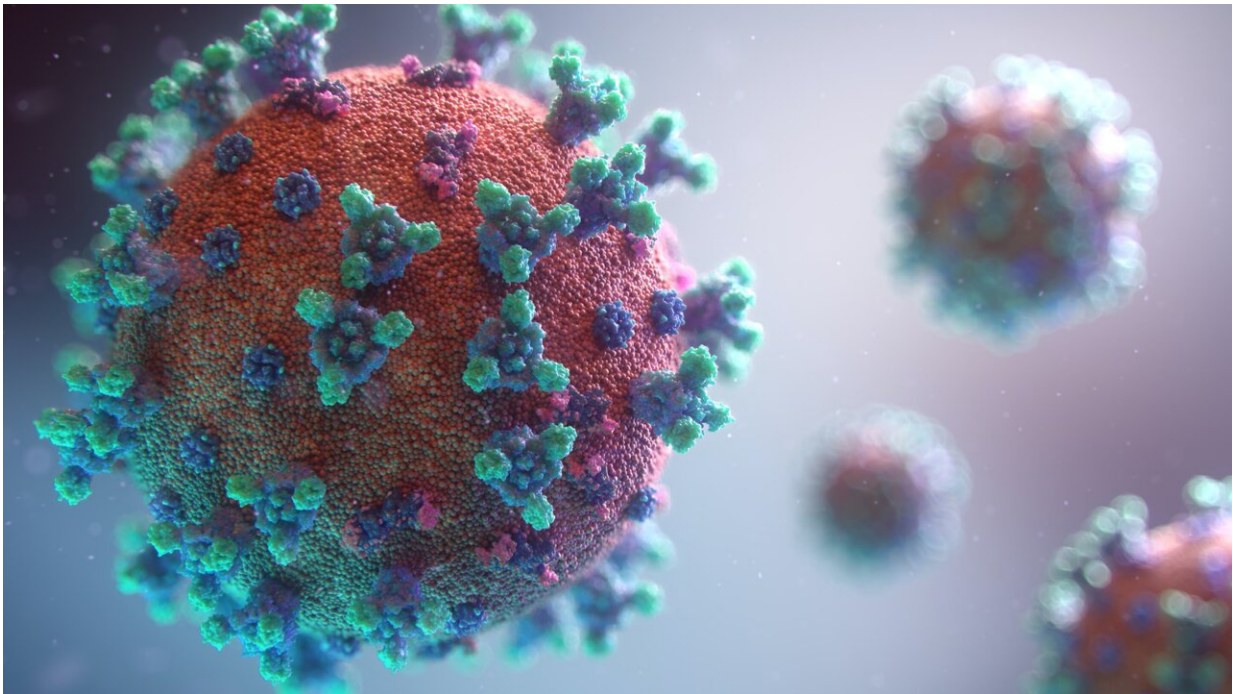
Several European countries lifted COVID measures too 'brutally': WHO

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Several European countries, including Germany, France, Italy and Britain, lifted their COVID curbs too "brutally" and are now seeing a rise in cases likely due to the more transmissible BA2 variant, the World Health Organization said Tuesday.

WHO Europe director Hans Kluge told a press conference in Moldova

that he was "optimistic but vigilant" about the pandemic's development in Europe.

COVID is on the rise in 18 out of 53 countries in the WHO European region, he said.

"The countries where we see a particular increase are the United Kingdom, Ireland, Greece, Cyprus, France, Italy and Germany".

He said the main reason behind the increase was likely the BA2 variant, which experts say is about 30 percent more contagious, but not more dangerous, than its predecessor BA1.

But in addition, "those countries are lifting the restrictions brutally from too much to too few," he said.

According to the WHO database, the number of new COVID cases in Europe fell sharply after a peak at the end of January, but has been on the rise again since early March.

Over the past seven days, more than 5.1 million new cases and 12,496 deaths have been reported in the WHO's European region.

That brings the number of cases since the start of the pandemic to almost 194.4 million and the number of deaths to more than 1.92 million.

Kluge said Europe was nonetheless relatively well set to cope with the virus now.

"There is a very large capital of immunity ... either thanks to the vaccination or due to the infection."

In addition, "winter is finishing so people will gather less in small,

crowded places, and thirdly, we know that Omicron is milder in fully vaccinated people including a booster", he said.

However, he recalled that "in countries with a low vaccination rate it's still a disease which kills."

Kluge said the world "will have to live with" COVID "for quite a time, but that does not mean that we cannot get rid of the pandemic."

In order to do so, he said countries needed to protect the vulnerable, strengthen their surveillance and genomic sequencing, and get access to new antiviral medicines.

Finally, he said countries needed to take care of 'post-COVID' sufferers and the backlog of medical care that has arisen during the pandemic.

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