

COVID cases reach 500 million worldwide

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As the number of known coronavirus cases worldwide hit 500 million on Tuesday, health experts called for increased testing, vaccination and contact tracing.

There's been a sharp rise in known cases so far this year, from 300 million in early January to 400 million in early February and [half a billion](#) now, *The New York Times* reported.

But many nations have scaled back official testing, so the actual number of infections is almost certainly far higher.

The reduction in formal testing is "dangerous" because if "you don't test, then you don't know what variants you have," Ali Mokdad, an epidemiologist at the University of Washington, in Seattle, told the *Times*.

World Health Organization officials recently [urged](#) African nations to boost testing and [contact tracing](#), and said some countries in the Americas need to increase vaccination and testing.

Such warnings have not stopped many nations from dropping their pandemic precautions almost completely in the two months since the global case count surpassed 400 million. In the United States, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [issued new guidelines](#) in late February suggesting that most Americans could stop wearing masks in indoor spaces.

But any return to normalcy is threatened by the swift spread of the Omicron subvariant known as [BA.2](#), the most transmissible version of the virus spotted so far. BA.2 now accounts for [85.9% of new cases](#) in the United States.

There is good news in that the number of [new cases reported](#) worldwide each day is about 32% lower than two weeks ago, with an average of about 1.1 million a day over the past week, the *Times* reported. And the [number](#) of coronavirus deaths is 23% lower than two weeks ago, with an average of 3,800 a day globally over the past week.

More information: Visit the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for more on [COVID-19 cases](#).

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