

COVID cases down, but pandemic 'not over': EU drug agency

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Europe's medicines watchdog said Tuesday that COVID-19 cases and death rates were falling, but warned the pandemic "is still ongoing" as it urged countries to roll out booster programmes before the winter.

Data collected over the last few weeks "showed that there has been a decrease in the overall number of cases and deaths caused by COVID-19 in Europe," the EU agency's head of [vaccine](#) strategy Marco Cavaleri said.

"However as autumn approaches we need to prepare for a new wave of infections in line with the trend shown by the virus in the past two years," Cavaleri said, speaking at a European Medicines Agency press conference.

The EMA did not give exact figures.

US President Joe Biden, in an interview aired by CBS on Sunday, said the pandemic was over in the United States.

"The pandemic is over. We still have a problem with COVID. We're still doing a lot of work on it... but the pandemic is over," Biden told the CBS news programme "60 Minutes" in an interview taped as he walked the floor of the Detroit Auto Show last week.

The Amsterdam-based EMA however said it still considered the pandemic as ongoing on the continent.

"What is clear to me and what should be very clear from Dr. Cavaleri's presentation is that we in Europe still consider the pandemic as ongoing," its chief medical officer Steffen Thirstrup told journalists in the online meeting.

"It is important that member states prepare the roll-out of the vaccines and especially the adaptive vaccines to prevent further spread of this disease in Europe," he said.

The EMA last week approved the [first vaccine](#)—an adaptive version of

Pfizer/BioNTech's Comirnaty—to specifically target the highly infectious BA.4 and BA.5 types of the coronavirus' Omicron variant.

The vaccine also targets "the original strain of SARS-CoV-2" and comes 11 days after the drug watchdog approved vaccines by Pfizer and Moderna against the Omicron BA.1 variant.

Some countries like Portugal and Denmark were already rolling out these vaccines, particularly to the elderly, but in other European countries people showed resistance to the idea of getting yet another COVID shot.

"We've seen polls in the Netherlands and Hungary pointing to a large degree of hesitancy among the [general population](#) for having these boosters," he said.

"I find it very concerning," he said.

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