

WHO: COVID-19 vaccination rates have dropped 50% in Africa

October 20 2022, by Krista Larson



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The number of COVID-19 vaccine doses given in Africa has dropped by more than 50% over the last three months, the World Health Organization said Thursday, even though less than a quarter of all Africans have been vaccinated.

Despite increased availability of vaccines on the continent, Africa still

lags far behind the global average, with only 24% of the population having completed their primary series of COVID-19 vaccination compared to 64% worldwide.

"The end of the COVID-19 pandemic is within sight, but as long as Africa lags far behind the rest of the world in reaching widespread protection, there is a dangerous gap which the virus can exploit to come roaring back," said Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO regional director for Africa.

Only three African countries—Liberia, Mauritius and Seychelles—have vaccinated more than 70% of their population. Rwanda is expected to reach the benchmark soon, and four others also have hit 50%, the WHO said Thursday.

Once COVID-19 vaccines became available in 2021, Western countries hoarded available supplies, leaving many African countries last in line to receive doses. Some African countries also said that the doses donated by Western countries were sent too close to their expiration dates to be fully utilized.

Africa now has adequate vaccines available, Moeti said Thursday. But as case numbers have fallen, so too has interest in being vaccinated. Only 4,281 new cases were reported on the continent last week—about 1.3% of Africa's peak during December 2021, the WHO said.

"Unfortunately, as vaccines have helped avert serious COVID-19 illness, hospitalization and death, people are less fearful and also less willing to get vaccinated," Moeti said.

Still, notable progress has been made, according to Aurelia Nguyen, special adviser with GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance. At the beginning of the year, there were 28 countries in Africa where [vaccination rates](#) were

below 10%.

"And since the beginning of the year, 22 countries have moved past this milestone," Nguyen said. "We've got Burkina Faso and Malawi that have become the latest countries to do so. We have Mali that is set to cross the milestone of more than 10% coverage in the coming weeks."

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Citation: WHO: COVID-19 vaccination rates have dropped 50% in Africa (2022, October 20) retrieved 9 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-10-covid-vaccination-africa.html>

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