WHO declares COVID global emergency over

May 6 2023, by Cara Murez

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More than three years after the coronavirus began ravaging the planet, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced Friday that the pandemic is no longer a public emergency.

"It's with great hope that I declare COVID-19 over as a global health emergency," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said during a news conference Friday.

"That does not mean COVID-19 is over as a global health threat," he said, adding he wouldn't hesitate to reconvene experts to reassess the situation should COVID-19 again "put our world in peril," the Associated Press reported.

Since it began spreading, COVID-19 has killed at least 7 million people worldwide, according to the AP. As many as 20 million may actually have died, Tedros noted. Cases have continued to spike in parts of the world.

Still, Tedros acknowledged that most countries have returned to more typical life, albeit with political divisions and poverty exacerbated by the spreading virus.

"COVID has changed our world, and it has changed us," Tedros said.

While he had expressed concern that some countries would be "ill-prepared," among those that experienced the most deaths were places like the United States, which would have been thought to be best prepared. Instead, only about 3% of the global death total happened in Africa, the AP reported.

WHO is among others now trying to determine the origin of the virus. The agency released a report in 2021 concluding that the virus likely jumped from animals to humans and said the idea that it was lab-originated was "extremely unlikely." Later it acknowledged that "key pieces of data" were still missing, making it impossible to make this determination, the AP reported.

A WHO-commissioned panel criticized China and other countries for not more quickly stopping the virus' spread. The panel said the WHO was limited in both finances and its ability to get other countries to act, the AP reported.

The United States is also bringing to a close its public health emergency declaration, including its vaccine mandates. Germany, France, Britain and others have already made similar moves, the AP reported.

It's now up to leaders to decide how to deal with future health threats, said Dr. Michael Ryan, WHO's emergencies chief. Countries are negotiating a pandemic treaty, the AP reported, but it may not be binding.

  More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on COVID-19.

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