

Coronavirus

Pandemic : High risk of autumn Covid surge in Europe despite drop in infections, says WHO

jeudi 10 juin 2021, par [HENLEY Jon](#) (Date de rédaction antérieure : 10 juin 2021).

Organisation urges governments to be cautious as societies open up and Delta variant advances.

Covid-19 infections, hospitalisations and deaths are falling fast across Europe but the risk of a deadly autumn resurgence remains high as societies open up and the more transmissible Delta variant advances, the World Health Organization has warned.

Urging people and governments to exercise “caution and common sense” over the summer, the WHO Europe’s regional director, Hans Kluge, said community transmission was still widespread and would continue as travel and social gatherings increased.

“We’ve been here before,” Kluge said. “Last summer, cases gradually rose in younger age groups, then moved into older age groups, leading to a devastating ... loss of life in the autumn and winter of 2020. Let’s not make that mistake again.”

Katy Smallwood, senior emergency officer, said the Delta variant first detected in India was of particular concern. She said : “It is not yet prevalent in the European region, but in some countries has already displaced the dominant Alpha variant.

“We’ve seen very significant evidence of significantly higher transmissibility, we’ve seen initial basis for increased risk of hospitalisation, and we’ve seen some evidence of immune escape, especially after only one dose of vaccine. Our assessment is that this does pose a significant risk in terms of community transmission.”

Map not reproduced here.

Which European countries are being hit the hardest ?. Case rate per 1m, last fortnight

Source : Johns Hopkins University Note : JHU collates this data from multiple sources whose methodologies may differ from each other. In addition, many of the sources have changed their reporting practices since the beginning of the pandemic or made revisions to their data.

Kluge said a new WHO campaign, Summer Sense, was meant to encourage people to “enjoy the summer, but safely ... If you want to travel, think about the need. If you decide to, do it safely.” Governments must “make use of a better epidemiological situation to further increase testing, tracing, hospital capacity. Learn the lessons from last year.”

Both officials warned that while Europe was vaccinating at a much faster rate, with 30% of people having received at least one dose and 17% fully vaccinated, coverage “was still far from sufficient to protect the region from a resurgence” and “many among vulnerable populations above the age of 60 remain unprotected”.

Kluge said Europe had so far recorded 55m infections and 1.2m deaths, but cases, hospital admissions and deaths had now fallen for two consecutive months, with 368,000 new cases reported last week, barely 20% of the April weekly figure.

Thirty-six of the region’s 53 countries were easing restrictions, he said. “But we are by no means out of danger,” he said, calling for “everyone to exercise caution, reduce risks and keep safe”.

“If you choose to travel, do it responsibly,” Kulge said. “Be conscious of the risks. Apply common sense and don’t jeopardise hard-earned gains. Wash your hands, keep a distance, choose open settings, wear a mask.”

To avoid a repeat of last year, he said, governments must “stick firmly to protective measures ... even as cases decline” by acting fast on any signs of increasing cases, expanding testing and sequencing and stepping up contact tracing.

The top priority of governments must be to “continue protecting elderly people, people with comorbidities and frontline workers”, he said, noting that the risk of severe disease or death in children was up to 800 times lower than in people aged 70 years or over.

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P.-S.

- The Guardian. Thu 10 Jun 2021 12.03 BST :
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/10/risk-of-covid-autumn-surge-is-high-despite-drop-in-infections-in-europe-says-who>

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