

WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 24 November 2021 - World

- Data suggest that before the arrival of the Delta variant, vaccines reduced transmission by about 60%. With Delta, that has dropped to about 40%. We cannot say this clearly enough: even if you are vaccinated, continue to take precautions to prevent becoming infected yourself, and to infecting someone else who could die. And we continue to call on all governments to implement a comprehensive and tailored approach of public health and social measures to prevent transmission, take the pressure off health systems and save lives.
- Yesterday, C-TAP and the Medicines Patent Pool finalized a licensing agreement with the Spanish National Research Council for a serological antibody test. This is the first transparent, global and non-exclusive license for a COVID-19 health tool. I would like to thank the government of Spain for its support for C-TAP, and I also thank His Excellency President Carlos Alvarado Quesada of Costa Rica for his leadership in initiating C-TAP last year. We hope this will be the first of many licenses to be shared through C-TAP.
- With the WTO Ministerial Conference next week and with the vast majority of countries now firmly supporting a waiver on intellectual property rights under the TRIPS agreement, I hope that consensus can be found and that we move forward.
- Today marks the end of Antimicrobial Awareness Week. Antimicrobials, including antibiotics, antivirals, antifungals and antiparasitics, are the backbone of modern medicine. But the overuse and misuse of antimicrobials are undermining the effectiveness of these essential medicines. By using antimicrobials responsibly, and by following the advice of your health care provider, we can all play a part in preserving antimicrobials and preventing drug resistance.

Good morning, good afternoon and good evening.

Last week, more than 60% of all reported cases and deaths from COVID-19 globally were once again in Europe.

The sheer number of cases is translating to unsustainable pressure on health systems and exhausted health workers.

In many countries and communities, we are concerned about a false sense of security that vaccines have ended the pandemic, and that people who are

vaccinated do not need to take any other precautions.

Vaccines save lives, but they do not fully prevent transmission.

Data suggest that before the arrival of the Delta variant, vaccines reduced transmission by about 60%. With Delta, that has dropped to about 40%.

If you are vaccinated, you have a much lower risk of severe disease and death, but you are still at risk of being infected, and of infecting others.

We cannot say this clearly enough: even if you are vaccinated, continue to take precautions to prevent becoming infected yourself, and to infecting someone else who could die.

That means wearing a mask, maintaining distance, avoiding crowds and meeting others outside if you can, or in a well-ventilated space inside.

And we continue to call on all governments to implement a comprehensive and tailored approach of public health and social measures to prevent transmission, take the pressure off health systems and save lives.

And it's vital that countries get patients that need care into the clinical care pathway earlier.

That applies to all countries, in all situations.

While Europe is again the epicentre of the pandemic, no country or region is out of the woods.

It's important for all countries to surge their capacities now to ensure the right measures are in place to avert the worst consequences of any future waves.

And we must do better at sharing the fruits of science.

In my home continent of Africa, many countries are off-track to reach the 40% vaccination target by the end of the year.

Many people who should have been vaccinated in low-income countries are missing out and are at greater risk of serious illness or dying.

It's not just about who we reach with vaccination, it's about who we miss. Priority must be given to health workers, older people and vulnerable groups, everywhere.

Through the ACT-Accelerator and COVAX, manufacturers and governments can easily prioritise sharing doses with those countries that have been starved of supply so that they can protect their most vulnerable.

And it's not just vaccines. It's important for all countries to have access to the rapid tests and new treatment options so that we know where the virus is and can take measures to slow the spread and treat those that need help.

Through WHO's COVID-19 Technology Access Pool, or C-TAP, manufacturers

can also easily pool technology and know-how, which would boost the overall supply that again is the major inhibitor to access.

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We hope this will be the first of many licenses to be shared through C-TAP.

WHO and our partners continue to explore every avenue for expanding access to life-saving tools.

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The ongoing chaos of this pandemic only underlines why the world needs an ironclad global agreement to set the rules of the game for pandemic preparedness and response.

This will be the subject of next week's Special Session of the World Health Assembly.

The world has treaties to manage other threats; surely countries can agree on the need for a binding pact on the threat of pandemics.

The Special Session of the World Health Assembly is therefore a unique opportunity;

An opportunity for a generational agreement that transcends media cycles and election cycles.

I'm encouraged that there is now a broad consensus for the need for such an instrument.

We will not achieve everything at the Special Session, but I hope it will serve as a launching pad for the development of an international agreement.

And even while we respond to this pandemic, we cannot lose sight of the many other threats to health that people face around the world, including antimicrobial resistance.

Today marks the end of Antimicrobial Awareness Week.

Antimicrobials, including antibiotics, antivirals, antifungals and antiparasitics, are the backbone of modern medicine.

But the overuse and misuse of antimicrobials are undermining the effectiveness of these essential medicines.

By using antimicrobials responsibly, and by following the advice of your health care provider, we can all play a part in preserving antimicrobials and preventing drug resistance.

Christian, back to you.