

SOLACE GLOBAL

COVID-19 Weekly Update

30 September

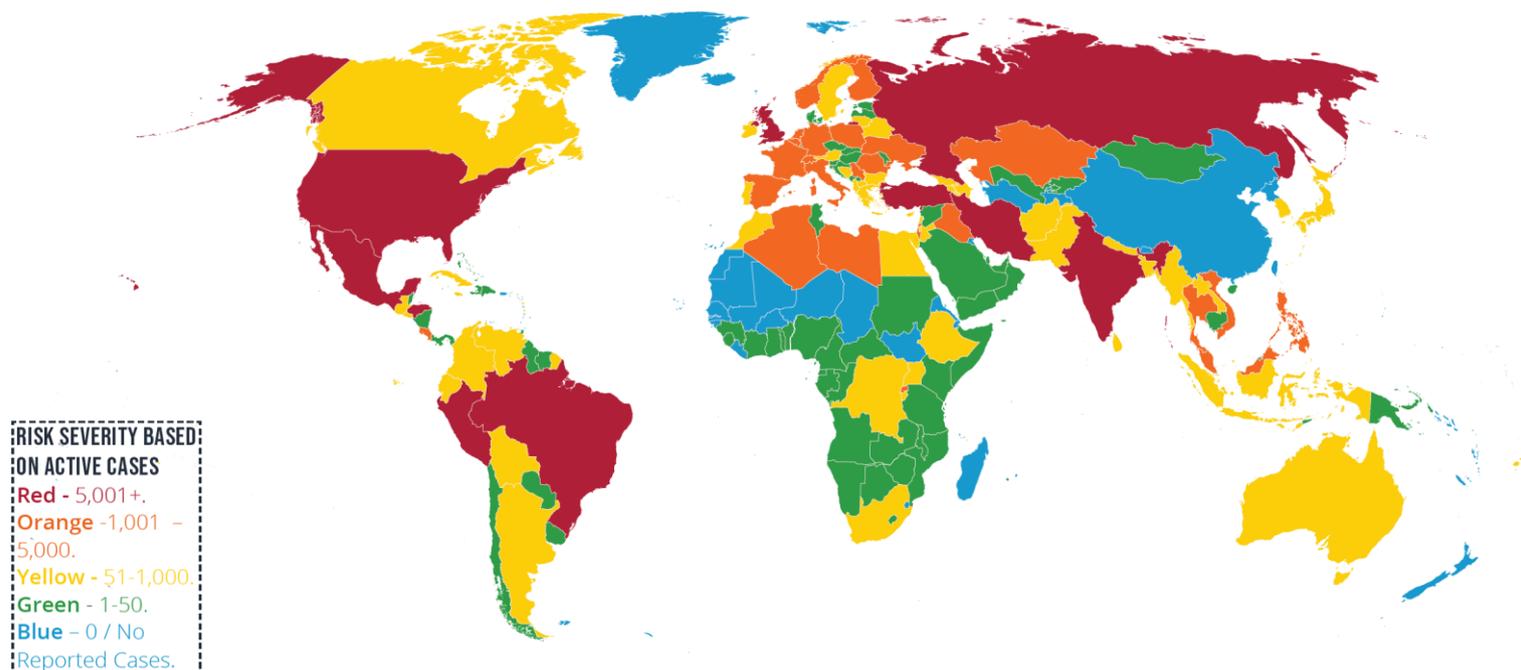


Executive Summary

Globally, the numbers of weekly COVID-19 cases and related deaths have declined in the past week, extending the downward trend that began in late August. In the last seven days, the worldwide numbers of infections and deaths are roughly ten and seven per cent lower respectively, compared to the figures for the preceding week.

Asia, South America, and Africa have all reported significant overall declines in their respective weekly caseloads; all of which are between 15 and 20 per cent lower compared to last week. Furthermore, Asia has seen a huge drop in the number of weekly deaths, with a decline of around 20 per cent. Despite the overall declines, dozens of countries in the aforementioned continents continue to report rising numbers of weekly cases, including Chile (+46%), Laos (+73%), and Angola (+61%).

Elsewhere, Europe has reported increases in the numbers of weekly cases and deaths, with both figures rising by around six percent compared to the preceding week. Europe's rising caseload is largely due to increasing numbers of cases in some countries in Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and Scandinavia. For instance, Romania has seen its weekly caseload rise by roughly 58 per cent, while Latvia, Ukraine, Poland, Denmark, Slovakia, Estonia, and Bulgaria having all reported weekly case increases of more than 20 per cent.



Notable Updates

Over the course of the past week, anti-vaccination sentiment has continued to fuel various forms of disruptive protest activity across the world. Protests have ranged from street demonstrations and strike action in Australia, to threats and raids targeting schools and hospitals in the United States and the United Kingdom.

The anti-vaccination movement continues to intensify in Australia, where in the past week, protesters took to the streets of Melbourne for multiple days in a row. The demonstrations were initially sparked by the decision of authorities to shut construction sites in the state of Victoria and make COVID-19 jobs mandatory for construction workers. The daily protests resulted in hundreds of arrests, violent clashes with police, and significant general disruption.

In the near term, the frequency and scale of such demonstrations are only expected to increase. On 1 October, protests organised by the National Education United (NEU) under the hashtag "ReclaimTheLine" are planned to take place nationwide, including in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Canberra, and Perth.

In the United Kingdom, some schools have been threatened by anti-vax campaigners after the NHS started to roll out COVID-19 vaccines for anyone aged 12 and older. Additionally, anti-vax campaign groups have sent hoax emails containing a COVID-19 vaccine consent form to schools and parents across the country. The fake form, which falsely claims to be from the NHS and includes various claims about the COVID-19 vaccine, is designed to deter people from getting the vaccinated.

Disinformation also continues in the United States, where vigilante groups continue to spread mistrust and scale up violence directed at health professionals. Furthermore, increasingly dangerous treatments are proliferating on social media under the guise of "alternative medicines". Most recently, the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America has issued warnings against an online trend urging people to inhale highly concentrated hydrogen peroxide, a toxic substance commonly used as a surface disinfectant in hospitals.

Vaccination Updates

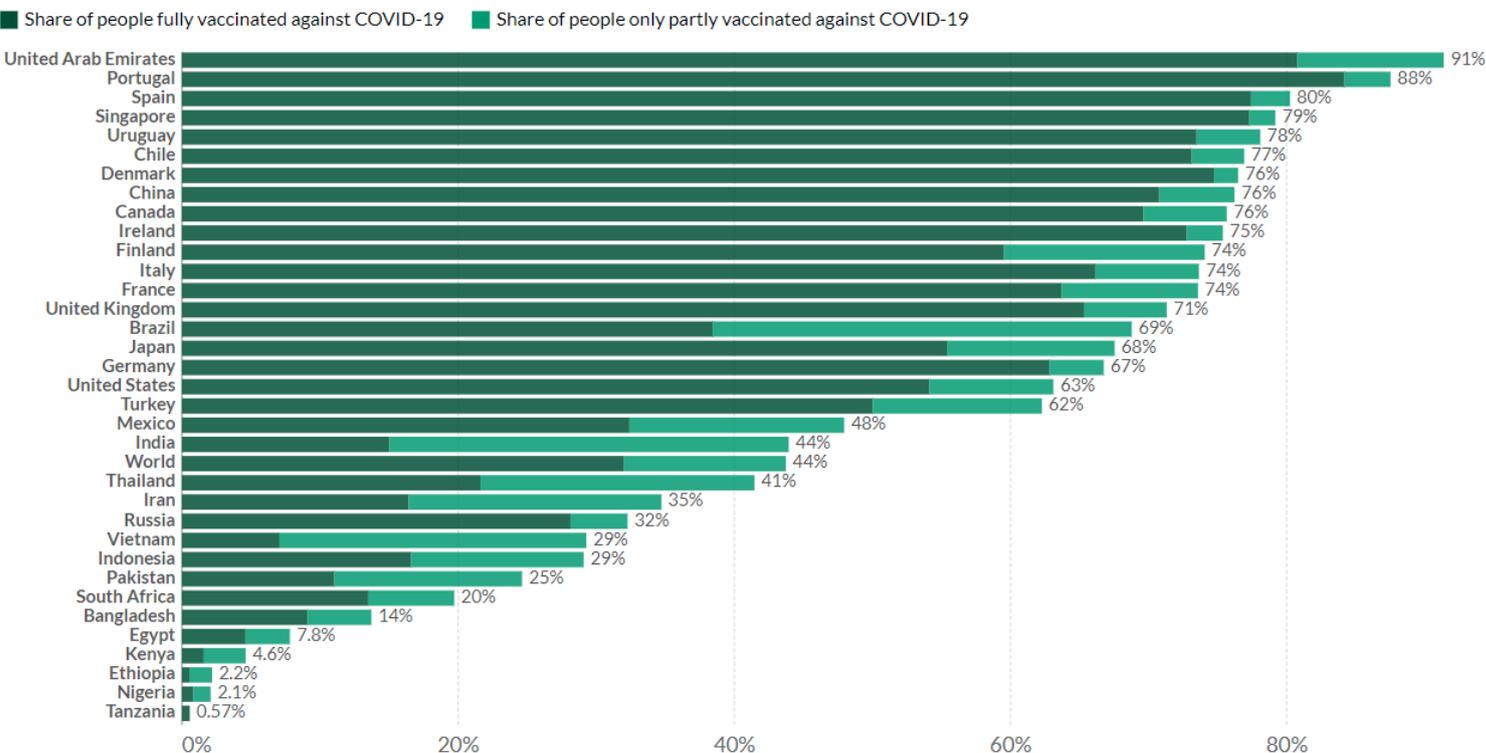
Since 14 September, the global COVID-19 vaccination drive has been a central point of discussion amongst world leaders at the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York. While addressing the issue of vaccine inequality, a number of African leaders highlighted the ongoing vaccine divide between their continent and the rest of the world, in particular Europe. President Mokgweetsi Masisi of Botswana stated that his country “shares the frustration of many and strongly supports the call for vaccines to be treated as a global public good”. When responding to the crisis of vaccine inequity at the Assembly’s virtual COVID-19 summit, President Biden pledged to donate 500 million more doses to developing nations over the course of the coming year.

This week the COVAX programme, created to ensure equitable access to vaccines, has come under pressure for reform after it was discovered that earlier on in the year it sent more vaccines to the UK than to less developed countries such as Botswana and Rwanda. Figures show in that March 2021, as the UK was leading the way in vaccine distribution, the country received over half a million doses of the Pfizer vaccine from the global vaccine sharing programme. Meanwhile Botswana, which at the time hadn’t begun its vaccination drive, was allotted a mere 20,000 doses, whilst Rwanda was given 100,000. According to COVAX, the reason for the disparity was that it had been allocating doses proportionally based on a country’s population size, and it did not consider factors such as ongoing vaccination campaigns, or a country’s wealth. Reform to COVAX methodology for vaccine distribution is expected to take place before the end of 2021.

In other news, Pfizer Inc is reportedly conducting clinical trials for experimental oral antiviral drugs. Trials will test whether the drug, PF-07321332, can prevent COVID-19 infection in individuals living in close contact with others with symptomatic infections. Whilst there are numerous vaccines available, several pharmaceutical companies are now researching the effectiveness of oral treatments, especially given the likelihood that the virus will need to be tackled on a seasonal basis. The introduction of oral antiviral drugs could bring some positive changes to COVID-19 treatment, including cutting down on equipment and the need for medical professionals to administer the drug, as well as easier transportation and storage.

Similarly, pharma giant Merck & Co and partner Ridgeback Biotherapeutics are also in the late stages of testing antiviral tablets. On 29 September, the US drugmaker said laboratory studies show the experimental drug, molnupiravir, is likely to be effective against known COVID-19 variants.

Percentage of People Vaccinated in Select Countries



Source: Official data collated by Our World in Data. This data is only available for countries which report the breakdown of doses administered by first and second doses in absolute numbers.

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Select Country Updates**Argentina**

The government recently announced a further easing of the country's remaining COVID-19 restrictions following a sharp drop in the number of cases. Indeed, daily infections have dropped from around 41,000 in late May to less than 2,000 in recent days.

Argentina's vaccination programme, which has seen more than 43 percent of the nation fully vaccinated, is believed to have played a major role in facilitating this drop. It has also been suggested that the dominance of the Gamma variant (formerly Manaus variant) has played a large role in keeping the highly infectious Delta variant at bay.

The announcement was greeted with cautious optimism by the country's medical sector. While some hospitals have reportedly not admitted a new intensive care patient for weeks, it is still too early to declare the end of the pandemic.

With the renewed order, masks are no longer mandatory outdoors and sporting stadiums can now operate at 50 percent of their capacity.

Russia

The country has recorded a new all-time high for daily deaths from COVID-19. On 29 September, statistics showed that 867 people were lost to the virus. The grim record had been broken on a few occasions in the past week. Since mid-July, the country's daily death tolls had plateaued at just below 800.

The new record comes not long after it was announced that Russian President Vladimir Putin was self-isolating after several members of his inner circle tested positive for the virus.

Health authorities in the country have long struggled with widespread vaccine scepticism among Russians. Polling routinely shows that over half the population will not get vaccinated. Several large cities, including the capital Moscow, have introduced mandatory vaccination policies in a bid to increase vaccine uptake.

The new recorded death toll and the associated lack of vaccinations has led to rumours that the Kremlin is considering a renewed national lockdown in the near term.

Syria

The war-ravaged country is continuing to see a worrying spike in the number of COVID-19 infections. Hospitals in the provinces of Damascus and Latakia have all reportedly reached full capacity. As a result, patients in these provinces are now having to be transferred to other medical establishments in provinces such as Homs and Tartus.

To make matters worse, health professionals and NGO workers have indicated that the data released by officials only reflects a small fraction of the actual death toll.

The decade-long civil war has effectively destroyed the

country's healthcare system, and this is compounded by the fact that around 70 percent of the country's medical workers have fled amid the war.

Alongside this, according to the WHO, less than half a million vaccination doses have been administered. As a result, any spike in COVID-19 cases is highly likely to see a large number of deaths.

Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, the government has announced that it is seeking a loan of USD 100 million from the world bank to fund its COVID-19 vaccination drive. The money will be used to buy 14 million doses of Pfizer vaccine. The country has already double jabbed over half its population with Chinese-developed vaccines.

Meanwhile, one of the country's highest profile Shaman's, who claimed he could end the pandemic using water he had blessed, has died from the virus. Eliyantha White, said he could end the pandemic by pouring his blessed waters into the country's drinking water system and rivers. He also claimed to have cured national sports stars and figures from the disease with his treatment. His national water plan was initially endorsed by the nation's Health Minister.

Laos

Several provinces in Laos continue to see large outbreaks of COVID-19. As of 28 September, daily cases had crept above 2,000, marking a record high for the nation.

As a result of this new high the government has implemented new measures to curb the spread of the disease. Measures include a lockdown in the capital Vientiane, and restrictions on travel between provinces with active COVID-19 cases. In the provinces under restrictions, residents will also not be allowed to leave their homes unless for certain essential purposes.

The country is aiming to vaccinate half of its population by the end of 2021. By 20 September, the country had fully vaccinated 26 percent of its population, whilst 38 percent had been given at least one dose. The country is relying mainly on the Pfizer and Chinese-made vaccines. Laos is also set to receive a further 2.4 million vaccine doses from China and Australia by the end of 2021.

Germany

The anti-vaccination message has entered the political arena, as right-wing populist 'Alternative for Germany' party (AfD) campaigned on a distinctly anti-vaccination message in the country's general election. AfD ultimately lost nationally, securing just ten per cent of the vote and falling from third to fifth most popular party.

Although COVID-19 cases have been falling in Germany, health authorities are warning that a rise in infections triggered by the Delta variant cannot be ruled out next month.



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