**Current global situation:**

By the end of September, over 233.1 million confirmed cases and 4.7 million deaths due to COVID-19 were reported to WHO. Following an increase in cases over the summer, weekly case incidence has declined throughout September. In the last week of September, all regions reported a decrease in the number of weekly cases. The number of weekly deaths continued to decrease significantly throughout September, with over 15% decline in new deaths for all regions except the European Region.

Please refer to the [WHO Weekly Epidemiological Updates](https://www.who.int) for further information.

**Current situation in the Region:**

As of 30 September, close to 70 million cases of COVID-19 and 1.3 million deaths have been reported across Europe. Over the past month, weekly case incidence in the Region has oscillated within a range of a <5% change week-on-week, with approximately 1 million weekly cases reported.

However, within the Region, countries have reported significantly varying trends. Several European countries continue to see renewed increases in cases, many linked to the continued spread of the SARS-CoV-2 Delta variant of concern. The impact these resurgences have had on public health has largely depended on the level of vaccination uptake seen in priority groups, particularly in the older age groups.

Hospitalization rates across the Region have seen fluctuations, particularly between weeks 36 and 38. Overall in the Region, weekly ICU admissions remain at less than 1 per 100 000 population. Weekly COVID-19 mortality plateaued in Europe over the past month with a weekly mortality rate of 1.6 per 100 000 reported on 30 September, after a gradual increase in deaths at the end of the summer period.

Please refer to the [WHO European Region Dashboard](https://www.euro.who.int) and the [WHO European Region Surveillance Bulletin](https://www.euro.who.int) for further information.

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Number of new confirmed COVID-19 cases reported by Epi-week in the WHO European Region from 16 February 2020 (epi week 8/2020) to 26 September 2021 (epi week 39/2021)
Update on SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern circulating in Europe

As the impacts of specific SARS-CoV-2 variants on public health become better understood, WHO has continued to assess the classification of variants of interest (VOIs) and variants of concern (VOCs) and revised the lists accordingly as part of a regular update in September 2021. A variant of SARS-CoV-2 can be designated as a VOI or VOC if it meets specific criteria. Variants may also be reclassified when there is sufficient evidence suggesting that there is no major ongoing risk to global health associated with the specific variant compared to other circulating SARS-CoV-2 variants (and thus no longer meets the criteria of a VOI or VOC).

The revised list of current VOIs now includes the Lambda and Mu variants, both circulating in Latin America, where the Delta variant has begun to circulate but has not yet become dominant. The epidemiology of these VOIs, particularly considering the co-circulation of the Delta variant, will continue to be monitored closely. Read more about the changes to the VOI and VOC classification [here](#).

In the European Region, as of 26 September 2021, the Delta VOC has been detected in 53 countries or areas. Based on data from 27 countries or areas in weeks 36 and 37, the median (range) proportion of all nationally sequenced virus isolates detected to be a VOC or VOI was 99.8% (0.0–100.0%) for Delta (B.1.617.2). See [WHO/Europe](https://www.who.int) and [ECDC Surveillance Bulletin](https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/european-surveillance-circular-2021-26).

Refer to the [WHO webpages on VOIs/VOCs](https://www.who.int) for more information.
Reopening of schools across the European Region:

Throughout September 2021, Member States across the European Region have reopened schools for the 2021–2022 school year. Many have used a model of in-person teaching combined with infection prevention and control (IPC) measures. Distance education, hybrid models and delayed starts have also been applied where epidemiological situations may not have allowed students to return in person. 12 countries reopened schools in August either nationally or subnationally, while 37 countries and 1 territory reopened in September with in-person teaching and IPC.

12 countries reopened schools in August either nationally or subnationally, while 37 countries and 1 territory reopened in September with in-person teaching and IPC.

Common mitigation measures such as mask wearing, hand hygiene, physical distancing and classroom participation limits have continued across the Region. Case detection has become more focused on individual close contacts of COVID-positive pupils, replacing earlier blanket approaches for whole classes or schools.

Additional measures applied sometimes include COVID-19 certificates of vaccination, recovery and/or negative test (CVRT). School staff and teachers are required to show CVRT in order to enter the premises. Frequent testing has also continued with students and teachers either testing once or twice per week, depending on the local COVID-19 situation or teaching model they apply. Where vaccination strategies include those under 18 years, mobile vaccination units have been dispatched to schools.

Schooling in the time of COVID-19 – resource pack with tips and tools to help guide the reopening of schools as safely as possible

Schools are essential for children’s learning, health, safety and well-being. Getting children back in the classroom remains a priority for UNICEF and WHO regional offices as the new school year starts. The need is to strike a balance between applying public health and social measures (PHSM) and ensuring that children are able to continue learning and socializing to the greatest extent possible. UNICEF and WHO have created several tools and resources to support countries in their back-to-school efforts. This joint Schooling Resource Pack has an easy-to-find compilation of materials to help parents/caregivers, teachers and students return to school safely.
WHO Regional Office for Europe’s response to COVID-19:

The WHO Regional Office for Europe’s response is built around a comprehensive global strategy to end the acute phase of the pandemic and build resilience and readiness for the future by targeting four areas: prepare and be ready; detect, protect and treat; reduce transmission; innovate and learn.

Key figures: Responding to COVID-19 in the WHO European Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>WHO has conducted 272 missions and deployments to 22 countries and territories in the Region</strong>*</th>
<th><strong>214</strong></th>
<th><strong>17</strong></th>
<th><strong>3</strong></th>
<th><strong>5</strong></th>
<th><strong>33</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-country technical support missions</td>
<td>Rapid support teams</td>
<td>Virtual country missions</td>
<td>Intra-action review missions</td>
<td>Operational partner deployments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The data presented have been adjusted following retrospective analysis of WHO’s records.

For additional information on missions and deployments, please see the WHO/Europe COVID-19 Country Support Dashboard for Missions and Deployments.
WHO's provision of medical equipment to Armenia

September 2021

WHO, with funding from the European Union (EU), has supplied imaging equipment to 7 COVID-19 frontline hospitals – 1 in the capital Yerevan and in 6 other cities. The new X-ray units facilitate monitoring of a patient’s progress and will improve clinical decision-making.

WHO has also delivered supplies to support vaccine roll-out. 30 refrigerators for vaccine storage were delivered to the Ministry of Health to strengthen the cold chain, and 1000 emergency anaphylaxis kits, used in the event of a severe allergic reaction following vaccination, were delivered to primary health-care facilities.

The deliveries were a part of a major effort by the EU and WHO/Europe to support the COVID-19 response and the deployment of COVID-19 vaccines and routine vaccination.

Please read more about supply deliveries to Armenia here and here.
In Focus

Opening of the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre in Kyrgyzstan
21 September 2021

On 21 September 2021, the Ministry of Health and Social Development officially launched the first Public Health Emergency Operations Centre (PHEOC) in Kyrgyzstan. The WHO Country Office provided technical support to develop an integrated epidemiological platform to strengthen and improve early detection and timely response capacities in accordance with the International Health Regulations (IHR, 2005) and to support the COVID-19 response. As WHO Member States establish or strengthen their PHEOCs, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of close coordination, timely information exchange and its analysis have been highlighted as crucial to effectively respond to all health emergencies.

In Kyrgyzstan, the PHEOC is located in the Department for Disease Prevention and State Sanitary Epidemiological Supervision (DDP&SSES) under the Ministry of Health and Social Development. The WHO Country Office has consistently provided technical support in line with the WHO Global Framework for a Public Health Emergency Operations Centre. During the opening ceremony, the Vice-Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of Kyrgyzstan expressed gratitude to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and WHO, for their continued support from and also noted the need to further strengthen the COVID-19 response in the country.
In Focus

WHO/Europe supports COVID-19 intensive care in Georgia
13–24 September 2021
Throughout the month of August 2021, Georgia saw a sharp rise in reported COVID-19 cases and deaths. These reached levels not previously seen in the country and placed significant pressure on the provision of quality care to patients.

Following a WHO expert mission conducted during the second half of August 2021, and upon the request of the Ministry of Health in Georgia, WHO supported a further mission to support intensive care unit (ICU) care for COVID-19 from 13 to 24 September 2021. WHO experts were deployed to review intensive care management, operational procedures and infection control procedures within 13 separate health facilities designated to provide services for severely and critically ill patients with COVID-19 in several regions of the country.

The mission team’s findings and recommendations were presented to key policy-makers and experts in Georgia, and a rapid refresher training was conducted with 26 intensive care medical staff. The training provided an occasion to refresh the knowledge of clinical practitioners involved in COVID-19 care on the provision of oxygen, prevention of complications in ventilated patients, nursing care and rational use of pharmaceuticals within the ICU.

Based on the findings, WHO will continue to support the Ministry of Health to strengthen clinical capacities and core nursing skills, including in support of enhanced specialized ICU care.

WHO continues to work with national authorities to strengthen capacities to rapidly identify and isolate COVID-19 cases, treat patients and trace, quarantine and test contacts.

In week 35, the WHO Country Office in Albania, in cooperation with the Balkans Hub and national health authorities, conducted a workshop for training of trainers on COVID-19 contact-tracing.

In week 36, the WHO Country Office in the Republic of Moldova initiated a review of the electronic platform for surveillance of communicable diseases and public health events.

In week 37, the WHO Country Office in Kazakhstan prepared communication materials for health workers on COVID-19 contact-tracing and case investigation. The materials were distributed across all oblasts of the country. In the same week, the Country Office in Kazakhstan supported a two-week training course on influenza for staff of the National Reference Laboratory and sentinel laboratories, delivered by two experts from the Research Institute of Influenza in St Petersburg.

From 13 September to 1 October, laboratory specialists from the WHO/Europe Incident Management Support Team for COVID-19 (IMST), were deployed to Tajikistan as part of a mission for the Better Labs for Better Health project.

The purpose of this mission was to provide further support through auditing all mentored laboratories to evaluate the real progress in the implementation of quality management, including sampling and sample transport organized for COVID-19. The mission also debriefed the National Laboratory Working Group on the outcomes of these audits and on future activities needed for better preparation in responding to COVID-19.
WHO is committed to supporting health authorities and communities in strengthening the public health response to the pandemic to slow and stop further spread of the virus.

In week 35, a webinar was held in Armenia for health-care workers on public health and social measures (PHSM) and the COVID-19 Delta variant. More than 250 health-care workers participated in the webinar, which covered topics such as the global epidemiological situation, PHSM, clinical considerations and an overview of the country’s current hospital capacity.

From 15 to 17 September 2021, the WHO Country Office in Uzbekistan, together with MoH, organized a training course on “IPC in the context of COVID-19” for health-care staff in the Andijan region, engaging more than 100 participants from health-care facilities.

In week 36, the WHO Country Office in Uzbekistan started a series of 3-day IPC training courses for health-care providers and managers. The courses will be held in every region of the country.

In week 37, the WHO Ukraine Country Office supported a 3-day face-to-face infectious substance shipment training (ISST), which was held at the Ukrainian Public Health Center, in Kyiv, from 13 to 15 September, in order to certify shippers of infectious substances for applicable international transport regulations. The training was carried out by the WHO Regional Office for Europe and attended by laboratory experts from Ukraine and Armenia. Modules included an introduction to transportation of infectious substances, shipping terms, categorization, packaging, marking and labelling, documentation and refrigeration.

In Focus

EU–WHO joint Solidarity for Health Initiative project on hand hygiene

20 September 2021

Hand hygiene is a crucial element of IPC measures, which is particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Azerbaijan, a hand hygiene competition was organized as part of the EU–WHO joint Solidarity for Health Initiative project among medical and nursing students. The winners of the competition, which took place in May 2021, received certificates and prizes, including a laptop, a tablet, handwashing and sterile glove-wearing training and various medical devices at the award ceremony on 20 September 2021.

As part of the competition, a training session was held and attended by 1418 students from 7 medical faculties and 11 nursing schools in Baku and other regions. The students passed the post-training test, and 212 of them submitted their videos. A jury of WHO experts then selected 21 videos as winners.

The results of the competition were presented at the International Conference on Infection Prevention and Control in Geneva, Switzerland in September 2021. Overall, the competition helped students to enhance their knowledge on IPC, using the WHO technique. Read more about the competition here.
In Focus

The Hospital of Tomorrow: WHO/Europe’s preliminary results from Bologna, Italy, provides key considerations for other hospitals

September 2020–2021

The WHO team in collaboration with the St Orsola-Malpighi Polyclinic Directors in Bologna, Italy officially launched the “hospital of tomorrow” project in September 2020.

The project was tasked with developing a participatory co-production design process that could build on the ideas and perceptions of St Orsola employees and the broader community, and shape how health-care facilities should look in the future.

While still in its implementation phase of identifying new standards for health-care facilities, the case study has found that changes are needed not only to the physical hospital structure, but also to procedures, practices and methods of stakeholder engagement.

Preliminary findings at St Orsola show that when hospital staff are included in working groups where all challenges are approached holistically, responsibilities are shared, regardless of hierarchy.

Creative solutions and effective plans emerge, “institutional memory” concerning past choices is preserved and communication between different professionals is enhanced.

Read more here.

WHO continues to assist Member States in optimizing and adjusting their COVID-19 response through high-level policy dialogues and health policy recommendations.

In 2020, the Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development was tasked by WHO/Europe with rethinking health and policy in the light of pandemics.

The recommendations of the Pan-European Commission give governments and decision-makers tools to prevent and better handle future health threats – recommendations that save lives and livelihoods, trigger innovation, empower people and protect the planet.

WHO also continues to employ innovative methods to ensure continuous learning, listening and improvement in COVID-19 response efforts.

In week 37, the WHO Country Office in Ukraine launched the WHO-UPHC E-Learning platform. This joint educational platform contains comprehensive courses for professionals working on the COVID-19 response and other public health fields, COVID-19 surveillance, COVID-19 epidemiology, IPC within a COVID-19 outbreak, the application of the Electronic Integrated Disease Surveillance System (EIDSS) for COVID-19 data management and Go.Data – field data collection, etc.

In Georgia, on 22 September, the WHO Country Office and its partners (UNICEF, UNOPS, UNFPA) launched a new initiative on “Minimizing the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak in Georgia through telemedicine and digital health solutions”. Over 250 rural facilities will receive supplies and telemedicine equipment to support the safe management of COVID-19.

In week 38, the WHO Country Office in Kazakhstan conducted an awareness session on the Open WHO platform for the Ministry of Health and medical universities.

National stakeholders expressed their willingness to use the content of the postgraduate curriculum for health-care professionals.
Throughout the COVID-19 response, WHO/Europe has aimed to leave no one behind and ensure that all those affected receive support and quality care.

In Georgia, in week 35, the WHO Country Office in collaboration with WHO headquarters worked on a protocol and budget to implement “A prospective cohort study investigating pregnancy outcomes for women and neonates infected with SARS-CoV-2 in Gagua Clinic, Tbilisi, Georgia”. Both the protocol and the budget have been developed.

In Albania, on 16 September 2021, a round table was organized with mental health experts and media at the venue of “Pandemic storytelling – How can art help us get through the COVID-19 pandemic” – a thematic exhibition of paintings by WHO Country Office staff as well as a Tirana-based individual artist, which were created during the COVID-19 pandemic.

WHO/Europe continues to work with national authorities and alongside international partners to tailor their responses specifically to high-risk groups and vulnerable populations.

A nongovernmental organization (NGO) in Romania, which cares for vulnerable people, is now able to respond to any type of national emergency, thanks to a fully equipped tent donated by WHO.

Carusel supports around 2500 people a year, including those who are homeless, people living with tuberculosis (TB) and HIV, sex workers, and people with substance abuse problems.

During the pandemic, Carusel turned its attention to providing sound advice to vulnerable populations about COVID-19 issues, including advising on individual protection measures, how to recognize and report symptoms of infection with the virus, and how to get vaccinated.

In Focus

WHO/Europe and the Federal Republic of Germany support children with disabilities in Belarus

2 September 2021

Children and people with disabilities are among the key populations who are vulnerable to COVID-19 and its negative consequences in terms of social and mental health. The WHO Country Office in Belarus and its partners have continued to support communities in addressing these challenges. The Republican Rehabilitation Center for Disabled Children in Belarus works to provide education and rehabilitation for children, so that they get the support and care needed, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The WHO Country Office in Belarus, with the support of the German Embassy in Minsk, provided 20 000 surgical masks to the Republican Rehabilitation Centre for Disabled Children for protection against COVID-19. The handover event took place on 2 September 2021, as part of the #Back2School campaign, which was launched by WHO/Europe. An Interactive quiz was organized for children and their parents with questions and answers to improve their knowledge on COVID-19 and how they can protect themselves.

This support to the Centre is part of a larger donation of 1.386 million surgical masks worth US$ 435 204, which the country received from Germany, with WHO support. WHO/Europe is committed to supporting countries throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and recognizes the support provided by the Federal Republic of Germany and, in particular, the German Embassy in Minsk for their donation.
WHO continues to work to accelerate vaccine deployment by providing training to health-care workers and introducing the COVID-19 vaccine.

In Azerbaijan, in week 36, a training programme took place on COVID-19 vaccination. The meeting was conducted with an expanded group of local trainers to review all training materials.

The training helped to improve knowledge and attitudes on counselling target populations and individual vaccine recipients on the available COVID-19 vaccines. In addition, the participants gained skills related to enhancing community and individuals’ knowledge of COVID-19 vaccines and, as a result, improve vaccination rates in the communities they serve. Feedback and comments received from the group were further incorporated into the training materials.

WHO continues to support the integration of COVID-19 vaccine roll-out as part of routine immunizations.

The WHO Country Office in the Republic of Moldova, in week 35, developed COVID-19 vaccine forecasting and absorption scenarios, and shared these with national health authorities to support short- and medium-term planning.

In week 36, the WHO Country Office in Albania provided operational support for the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines from the central warehouse to districts, and for the establishment of 7 mobile COVID-19 vaccination units.

In Greece in week 36, the WHO Country Office supported the preparation of the training on “Communicating with patients around COVID-19 vaccines” by translating and interpreting material as well as communicating with community organizations and technical teams.

In Focus

Behavioural Insight results used to tailor a communication campaign in Serbia

September 2021

Following implementation of the sixth wave of the Behavioural Insights study in Serbia in August 2021, in week 36, the WHO Country Office used the first results received from the WHO Regional Office for Europe to support a communication campaign on promoting COVID-19 vaccination. The campaign was tailored to specific target groups, depending on available information on vaccine roll-out. The campaign enabled successful implementation of the immunization campaign and helped to reduce vaccine hesitancy.

WHO/Europe COVID-19 Vaccine Programme Monitor Dashboard

Status of COVID-19 vaccine deployment among European countries/territories

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>296</td>
<td>Days since the first country in the Region started deploying COVID-19 vaccines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>European countries and territories launched COVID-19 vaccination campaigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>European countries and territories are reporting vaccination data to WHO</td>
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</table>
Further developing the COVID-19 knowledge base:

A new strategic document was officially presented at the “Lessons learned from COVID-19: getting ready for the next pandemic” event, on 13 September – part of the Seventy-first Session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (RC71). Within it are outlined 10 major lessons that have so far been identified by Member States in the Region and their partners. This document is intended to enhance national and community resilience against health emergencies and safeguard regional and global health security now and in the future.

Building on the independent reviews set up by the WHO Secretariat related to COVID-19, the document entitled “Response to the COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learned to date from the WHO European Region” takes an “all-hazards approach”, recognizing that it is impossible to predict with certainty what hazard will appear next and what its impacts will be. While some responses to COVID-19 may not be applicable in all future crisis scenarios, learning from the pandemic will allow Member States and WHO to prepare their systems and the capacity of societies to better absorb the shocks that future emergencies may bring.

The concrete steps needed to prepare for and protect the Region from future pandemics and health emergencies was a central theme on the agenda of RC71 and were also in focus during discussions on the recommendations of the Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development. During the current pandemic, values such as equity, solidarity and collaboration have been recognized as central to resilience and essential to drive an effective response, based around the concept that “no one is safe until everyone is safe”.

New WHO technical guidance published in September 2021

WHO competency framework: building a response workforce to manage infodemics

WHO competency framework: building a response workforce to manage infodemics aims to orient and support the design, development and evaluation of the needs of an institution’s workforce. This framework can assist institutions in strengthening infodemic management capacity by hiring, staff development and human resource planning. It is structured to benefit all workers active in infodemic management in health institutions and organizations, including leaders and people who have active roles that influence decision- and policy-making.

The framework is conceptualized around the five workstreams for infodemic preparedness and response along the epidemic curve, analogous to an epidemic response. It is structured around four domains that contain competencies for infodemic managers in the form of tasks, and the knowledge and skills that are needed to perform them.

Global guidance highlights:

Frequently asked questions: COVID-19 vaccines and breastfeeding based on WHO interim recommendations
Published 15 September 2021

Updated therapeutics and COVID-19: living guideline
Published 24 September 2021

COVID-19 vaccines: safety surveillance manual, 2nd ed
Published September 2021

Publications from the European Region:

Drawing light from the pandemic: a new strategy for health and sustainable development
Published September 2021

COVID-19 and the opportunity to strengthen health system governance (Eurohealth)
Published 12 September 2021
Key figures: Responding to COVID-19 in the WHO European Region

WHO has conducted 272 missions and deployments to 22 countries and territories in the Region*

- **214** In-country technical support missions
- **17** Rapid support teams
- **3** Virtual country missions
- **5** Intra-action review missions
- **33** Operational partner deployments

*Corrigenda:*

These corrections have been incorporated into the electronic file on 19 October 2021.