

Weekly COVID-19 Epidemiological Update - Region of the Americas

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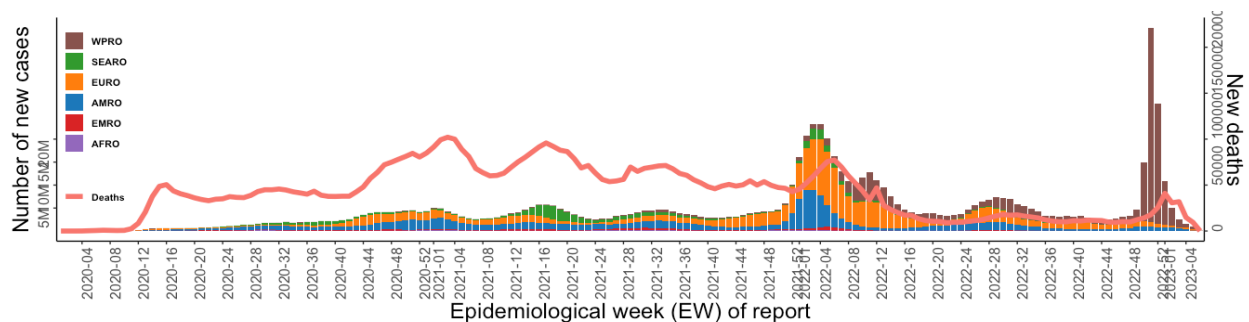
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Executive Summary

- **Since the onset of the pandemic** in 2020 and up to 07 February 2023, a cumulative total of approximately 754.7 million COVID-19 cases including about 6.8 million deaths were reported from all six WHO regions. During epidemiological week (EW) 5, COVID-19 cases decreased in all six WHO regions (range: -90.2 - -3.4%). COVID-19 deaths decreased in five WHO regions (range: -89.5 - -5.4%) while they increased in EMRO (24.5%).
- **Globally**, approximately 1,333,495 new COVID-19 cases were reported in EW 5 (29 January 2023 – 04 February 2023) - a -14.6% decrease compared to EW 4 (22 January 2023 - 28 January 2023) (**Figure 1**). For the same period, 13,313 new COVID-19 deaths were reported globally – a -10.6% relative decrease compared the previous week.
- **In the region of the Americas**, 416,516 cases and 4,990 deaths were reported in EW 5 – a -7.6% decrease in cases and -5.4% decrease in deaths compared to the previous week.
- At the subregional level, COVID-19 cases decreased in all four subregions (range: -20.3 - -6.3%), while deaths increased in two subregions – South America (18.1%) and Central America (25.6%).
- The overall weekly case notification rate for the region of the Americas was 40.7 cases per 100,000 population during EW 5 (44.1 the previous week). Between EW 5 and 4, the 14-day COVID-19 death rate was 10 deaths per 1 million population (10.7 the previous two weeks).
- Among 20 countries/territories in the region with available data, **COVID-19 hospitalizations** increased in 1 country (4 hospitalizations, 100%) during EW 5 compared to the previous week. Among 19 countries and territories with available data, **COVID-19 ICU admissions** increased in 3 countries and territories (range: 3.7% - 100%).

Figure 1: COVID-19 cases and deaths by epidemiological week (EW) of report and WHO region. EW 4 2020 - EW 5 2023.

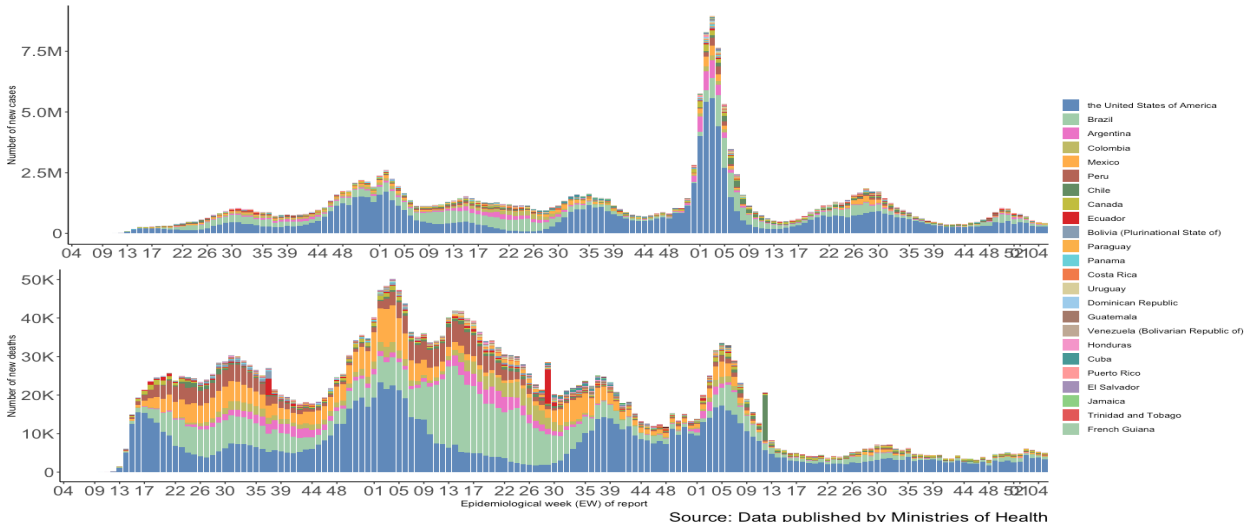


Source: Data from WHO COVID-19 Dashboard

Data are retro-adjusted every week and the numbers and percent changes of COVID-19 cumulative cases and deaths may not match with the previous COVID-19 weekly situational reports.

Region of the Americas - An overview

Figure 2: COVID-19 cases and deaths by epidemiological week (EW) of report and country/territory. Region of the Americas. EW 3 2020 - 5 2023.



During EW 5, 416,516 new **COVID-19 cases** were reported in the region of the Americas - a relative decrease of -7.6% compared to previous week (**Figure 2**). The highest number of COVID-19 cases in the last week was reported from North America (306,457 cases, -6% decrease) compared to the previous week. (**Table 1**). During EW 5, the highest proportion of weekly COVID-19 cases at the national level were reported by the United States of America (279,280 new cases, -4.9% decrease), Brazil (75,391 new cases, -3.9% decrease), Mexico (16,821 new cases, -23% decrease).

Table 1: Weekly change (%) in cases and deaths between EW 4 and EW 5 by subregion. Region of the Americas

Subregion	Total Cases	Total Deaths	Cases EW 04	Deaths EW 04	Cases EW 05	Deaths EW 05	% Change Cases	% Change Deaths
Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands	4,383,485	36,157	8,010	57	6,382	49	-20.3%	-14.0%
Central America	4,209,164	54,175	9,414	43	7,815	54	-17.0%	25.6%
North America	113,162,110	1,483,525	326,896	4,187	306,457	3,721	-6.3%	-11.1%
South America	67,439,149	1,345,059	106,483	987	95,862	1,166	-10.0%	18.1%

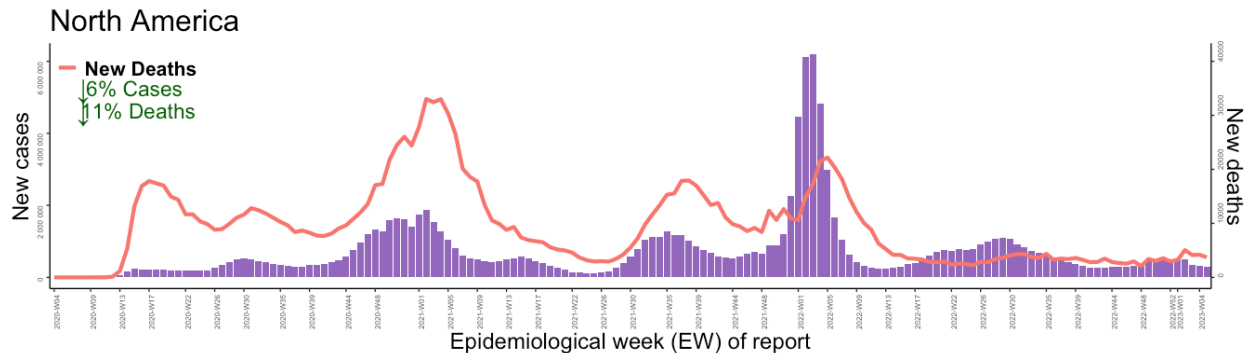
For the same period, 4,990 **COVID-19 deaths** were reported in the region of the Americas - a relative decrease of -5.4% compared to previous week (**Figure 2**). The highest number of COVID-19 deaths in the last week was reported from North America (3,721 deaths, -11% decrease) (**Table 1**). At the national level, the highest proportion of weekly COVID-19 deaths were reported by the United States of America (3,401 new deaths, -9.3% decrease), Brazil (603 new deaths, 8.8% increase), and Peru (356 new deaths, 189.4% increase).

A summary of the COVID-19 trends for EW 5 by subregion is presented below.

North America

The overall trends for COVID-19 cases have been decreasing in North America as of EW 5. During EW 5, all three countries in the subregion observed a decrease in weekly cases for the third consecutive week – with the largest decline in cases being reported by Mexico (16,821 cases, -23% decrease), followed by Canada (10,356 cases, -9% decrease), and the United States of America (279,280 cases, -4.9% decrease).

Figure 3: COVID-19 cases and deaths by epidemiological week (EW). North America. Region of the Americas. EW 3 2020 - EW 5 2023.



For the same period, **weekly COVID-19 deaths** decreased by -11.1% in North America during EW 5 relative to the previous week. Similar to weekly cases, all three countries in the subregion reported a decline in weekly deaths. The largest decline in deaths were reported by Mexico (125 new deaths, -35.2% decrease), followed by Canada (195 new deaths, -20.4% decrease), and the United States of America (3,401 new deaths, -9.3% decrease).

During EW 5, among the two countries in North America with available data for **COVID-19 weekly hospitalizations and ICU admissions** the United States of America continued to report a decrease in both hospitalizations (n=30,707, -7.9% decrease) and ICU admissions (n=3,914, -9.6% decrease) for the fourth consecutive week. Similarly in Canada, both weekly hospitalizations and weekly ICU admissions decreased for the third consecutive week (4,185 hospitalizations, -9.6% decrease & 198 ICU admissions, -7.9% decrease) during EW 5.

The Omicron lineages BA.5 and XBB are circulating in all three countries in the subregion. In the United States of America, the proportions of the BA.5 subvariant have been gradually decreasing over the past three months and its sub-lineages, BQ.1 and BQ.1.1, have been decreasing in the last month, while the estimated proportions of XBB sub-lineages have been rapidly increasing since mid-December – accounting for 68.7% (including 66.4% of XBB.1.5) of sequences for the week ending on 4 February 2023¹. The sub-lineages of BA.5 and XBB.1.5 made up about 81.7% (including 7.9% of BQ.1 and 35.7% of BQ.1.1) and about 10.6% in EW 3, respectively in Canada². The sub-lineages of BA.5 and XBB made up about 73.5% and 22% of sequences in EW 1 in Mexico, respectively.

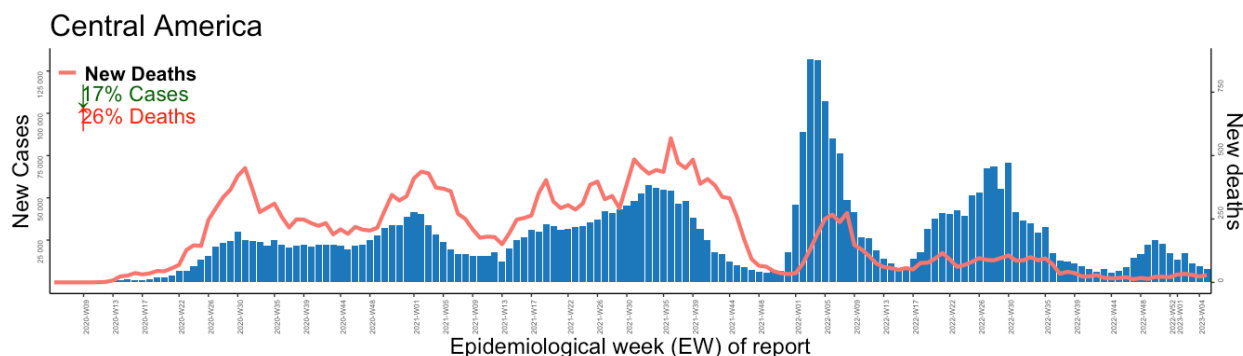
1 The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Variant Proportions. Accessed 7 February 2023. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3Obz8cT>

2 Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). COVID-19 Variants in Canada. Accessed 7 February 2023. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3bbFRFR>

Central America

In Central America, the overall **COVID-19 incidence** for the sub-region has been on a downward trend for the past three consecutive weeks with 7,815 new cases being reported during EW 5 – a -17.0% decrease compared to the previous week (**Figure 4**).

Figure 4: COVID-19 cases and deaths by epidemiological week (EW). **Central America, Region of the Americas.** EW 6 2020 - EW 5 2023.



During EW 5, **COVID-19 weekly cases** increased in two countries – Costa Rica (4,201 new cases, 10.4% increase) and Honduras (384 new cases, 4.9% increase) compared to the previous week. The remaining four countries observed a decline in weekly cases, and there were no cases reported by El Salvador. The countries/territories with the largest decline in cases this week included Guatemala (2,644 new cases, -41.5% decrease), Panama (513 new cases, -19.8% decrease), and Nicaragua (23 new cases, -17.9% decrease).

For the same period, **weekly deaths** increased by approximately 25.6% relative to the previous week (**Figure 4**) with three out of the seven countries and territories reporting an increase – the highest increase in deaths being observed from Panama (3 new deaths, 50% increase), followed by Costa Rica (23 new deaths, 43.8% increase), and Guatemala (28 new deaths, 21.7% increase). The remaining countries/territories did not report any deaths during EW 5.

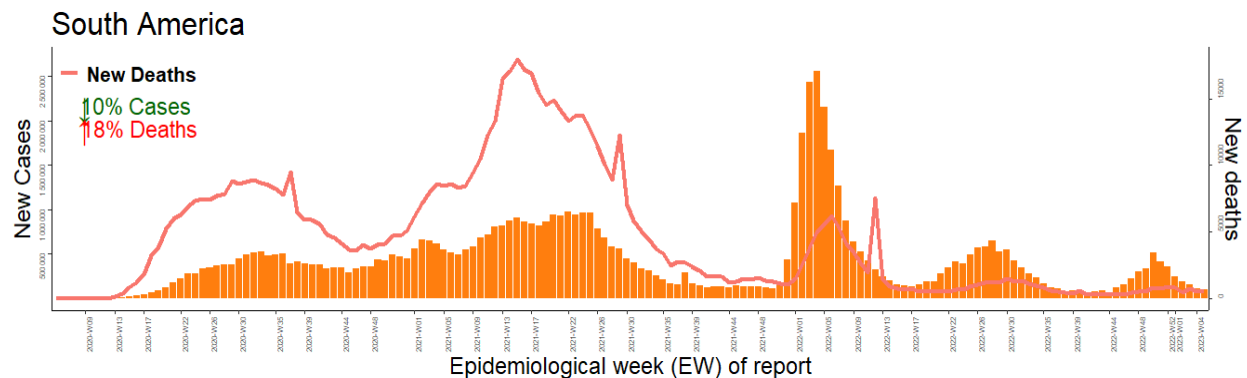
Among four countries/territories with available data for **weekly COVID-19 hospitalizations** in the Central American subregion, one country – Belize – reported an increase in their weekly COVID-19 hospitalizations (n=4, 100% increase), while the remaining three observed a decline (range: -44.4 - -2.4% decrease). With regards to ICU admissions, all three countries and territories with available data for **weekly COVID-19 ICU admissions** either reported a decline (Costa Rica, 161 hospitalizations, -27.8% decrease) or remained the same during EW 5 compared to the previous week.

To date, the Omicron lineages BA.5 and XBB have been reported from six and three of the seven countries and territories in the subregion, respectively – Costa Rica (BA.5 and XBB), Panama (BA.5 and XBB), Guatemala (BA.5 and XBB), El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Belize.

South America

In South America, the overall **COVID-19 incidence** for the subregion has decreased by -10%, with a total of 95,862 new COVID-19 cases being reported during EW 5 compared to the previous week (**Figure 5**). Please note that data for EW 5 for Ecuador was not publicly available and it could result in a data artifact in percent changes for cases and deaths in the subregion.

Figure 5: COVID-19 cases and deaths by epidemiological week (EW). South America. Region of the Americas. EW 3 2020 - EW 5 2023.



During EW 5, all countries and territories in the subregion reported a decline in **COVID-19 weekly cases** (range: -50.8 - -3.6% decrease). The largest decline in cases was reported by Uruguay (555 new cases, -50.8% decrease), followed by Peru (1,482 new cases, -48.4% decrease), and Paraguay (269 new cases, -43.7% decrease).

During EW 5, a total of 1,166 **COVID-19 deaths** were reported in South America – a 18.1% increase compared to the previous week. The largest proportion of reported deaths were reported by Brazil (603 new deaths, 8.8% increase), followed by Peru (356 new deaths, 189.4% increase), and Chile (111 new deaths, -10.5% decrease).

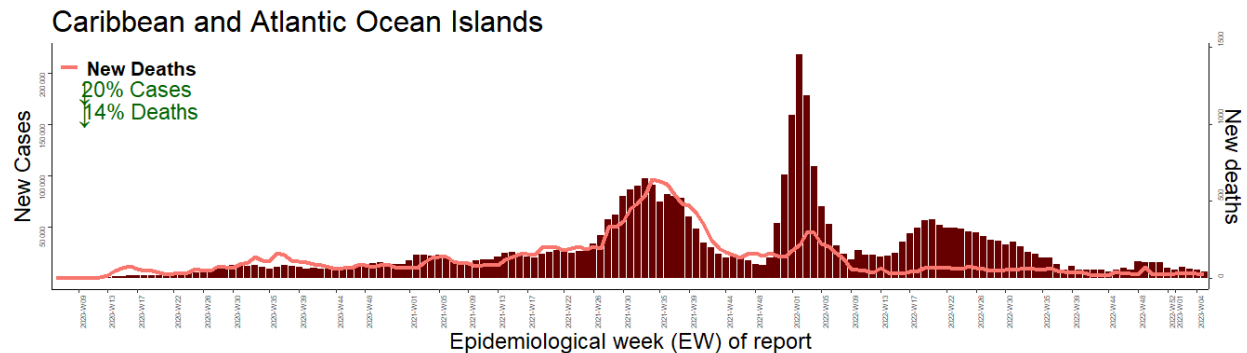
Among the four countries and territories in the subregion with data available for **COVID-19 weekly hospitalizations**, all countries and territories reported a decline in their weekly COVID-19 hospitalizations (range: -34.1 - -5%). The largest decline was observed in Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) (135 hospitalizations, -34.1% decrease), followed by Peru (123 hospitalizations, -15.8% decrease). For the same period, one out of five countries and territories with data available for **COVID-19 ICU admissions** reported an increase in their weekly COVID-19 ICU admissions – Chile (111 ICU admissions, 3.7% increase), while the remaining four reported a decline – Uruguay (13 ICU admissions, -45.8% decrease), Colombia (88 ICU admissions, -21.4% decrease), Peru (53 ICU admissions, -19.7% decrease), and Argentina (343 ICU admissions, 5.5% decrease).

To date, the Omicron lineages BA.5 and XBB have been reported from ten and eight out of the 10 countries in the subregion, respectively – Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of) (BA.5 only), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay (BA.5 only), Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands

In the Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands sub-region, **COVID-19 weekly cases** decreased by -20.3% (6,382 new cases) compared to the previous week (**Figure 6**). At the national level, cases increased in five countries/territories in the subregion (range: 49.1% - 175% increase) while they either declined (n=16, range: -100% - -15.2% decrease) or remained the same (n=1) in the remaining 17 countries and territories.

Figure 6: COVID-19 cases and deaths by epidemiological week (EW). Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands. Region of the Americas. EW 6 2020 - EW 5 2023.



For the same period, **COVID-19 weekly deaths** decreased by -14.0% (49 deaths) in the Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands subregion. Three countries and territories observed a relative increase in their weekly deaths in EW 5 compared to the previous week – Martinique (2 deaths, 100% increase), Suriname (2 deaths, 100% increase), and Sint Maarten (2 deaths, 100% increase). Weekly deaths remained the same in two countries and territories – Jamaica and Guyana (0% change) – and declined in three countries and territories of the subregion – Guadeloupe, Trinidad and Tobago, and Puerto Rico (range: -50 – -25% decrease). The remaining countries and territories did not report any deaths during EW 5.

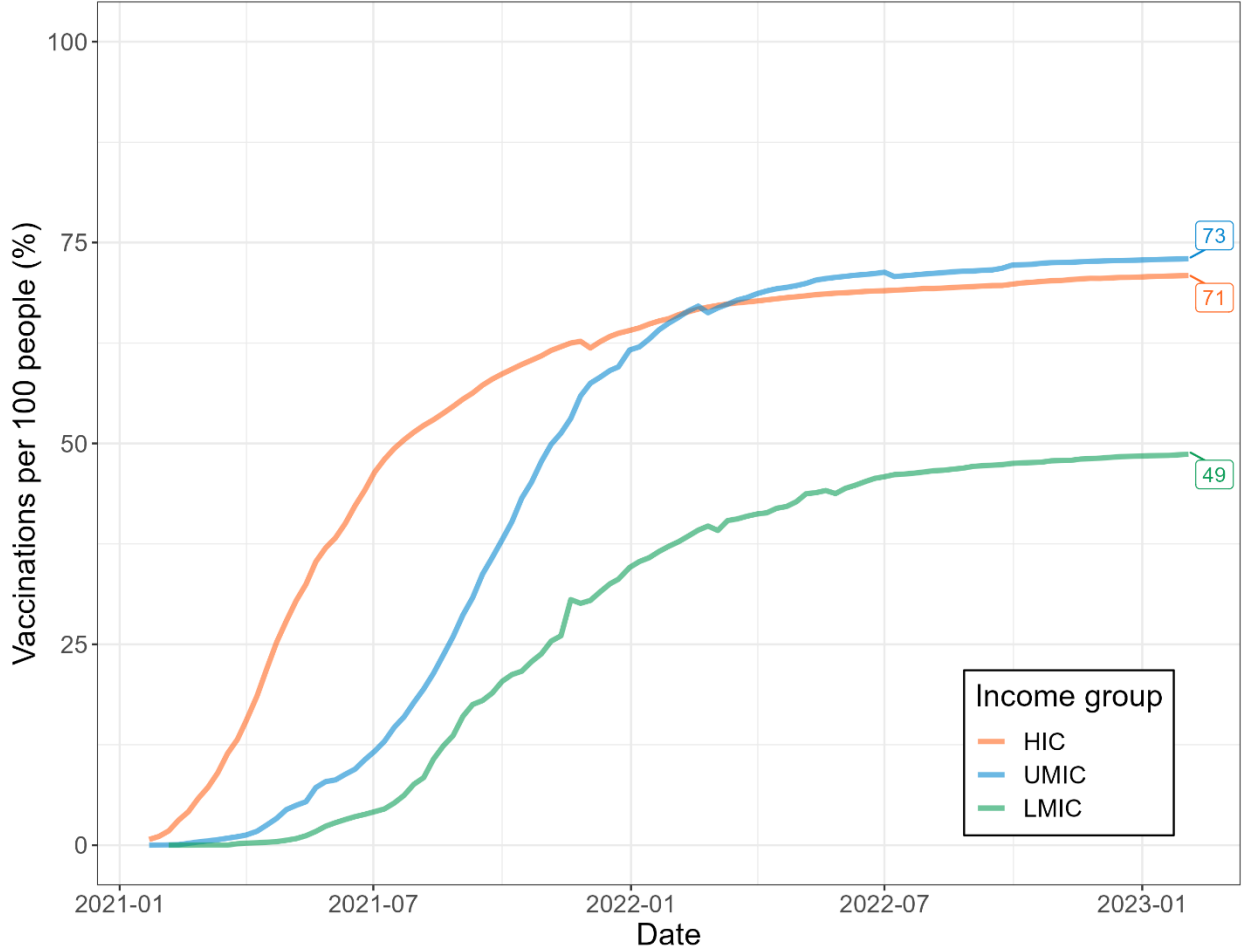
During EW 5, among the 10 countries and territories with available data for **weekly COVID-19 hospitalizations**, nine countries and territories reported a decline in their weekly COVID-19 hospitalizations (range: -100% - -6.5%) and one remained the same – Virgin Island (US) (1 hospitalization). Among nine countries and territories with data available for **COVID-19 ICU admissions**, two reported an increase in their weekly COVID-19 ICU admissions (range: 66.7 - 100% increase) including Guyana (3 ICU admissions, 100% increase) and Suriname (5 ICU admissions, 66.7% increase). The remaining countries and territories reported a decrease in their weekly COVID-19 ICU admissions (n=7, range: -100% - 16.7% decrease).

Notable increases in weekly cases in the subregion during EW 5 were observed in Bonaire (11 new cases, 175% increase), Sint Maarten (4 new cases, 100% increase), Turks and Caicos Islands (the) (15 new cases, 100% increase), and Cuba (79 new cases, 49.1% increase).

To date, the Omicron lineages BA.5 and XBB have been reported from 20 and 11 countries and territories in the subregion respectively. However, these trends should be interpreted with caution due to the presence of differences in sequencing capacity and sampling strategies between countries and territories.

Immunization

Figure 7: COVID-19 Complete Primary Series vaccination coverage by Income Group in the Region of the Americas. As of EW 5 2023.



The figure (**Figure 7**) describes the reported coverage* for primary series vaccination against COVID-19 by income group**. When stratifying by income, the stagnation in vaccine administration and reporting is noticeable. Vaccination coverage has plateaued among all groups. After the Upper Middle Income (UMIC) group overtook the High Income (HIC) group in March 2022, few changes in coverage have been reported. The HIC group surpassed 70% coverage in October 2022, while the UMIC group did so 5 months earlier, in May 2022. The Lower Middle Income (LMIC) group, with 6 countries and territories, remains below 50% coverage.

* Based on the United Nations (UN) Population Prospects for 2021 and projections from the United States (US) Census Bureau for countries with 100,000 or fewer inhabitants

** Based on the World Bank 2021-2022 Income Level Classification

Genomic surveillance

Through PAHO's Genomic Surveillance Regional Network and the work from the Member States, 529,612 full genome sequences of SARS-CoV-2 from Latin America and the Caribbean have been uploaded to the Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID) platform up to 7 February 2023.

The Omicron variant of concern (VOC) was introduced in the Americas at the end of 2021, and it rapidly replaced Delta VOC and other lineages throughout the Region. Omicron has been predominant in all PAHO countries since the beginning of 2022. In the past two months, very few sequences from "previously circulating" VOCs have been detected in the Region (a single Delta sequence was detected in North America during that period).

Omicron comprises the BA.1 to BA.5 sublineages (or subvariants), which are in turn subdivided into diverse sublineages based on additional mutations that slightly change their genomic profile. These sublineages of BA.1 to BA.5 include those denominated as BC.x to DZ.x. Several sublineages arising from recombinations involving Omicron viruses have also been described. The cumulative proportion of Omicron sequences collected in the Americas from November 2021 to date are: 40.3% of BA.1 (and BA.1 sublineages), 23.1% of BA.2 (and sublineages), <0.1% of BA.3 (and sublineages), 4.1% of BA.4 (and BA.4 sublineages), 31.0% BA.5 (and BA.5 sublineages), and 1.4% recombinant sublineages. Although BA.1 accounts for the majority of cumulative sequences, BA.2 became predominant in all subregions between weeks 12 and 15 of 2022, and BA.4 and BA.5 became predominant between weeks 25 and 34 (**Figure 8**). Since then, BA.5 proportion has continued to increase, while BA.4 proportion has decreased. Moreover, BA.2 sublineages have increased again in the same period, with the circulation of several BA.2.75 sublineages. The proportion of recombinant lineages has also been increasing since week 41, driven by increased circulation of XBB (and sublineages), a recombinant between two BA.2 sublineages.

Most viruses currently circulating in the Americas correspond to BA.5 and XBB sublineages, and to a lesser extent BA.2.75 sublineages (in particular CH.1.1). In the past eight weeks, BA.5 and its sublineages, in particular BQ.1, represented 74.9%, 64.4%, 37.3%, and 69.5% of the characterized samples in North America, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America, respectively. During the same period, recombinant lineages represented 18.8%, 25.8%, 60.7% and 25.6% of the characterized samples in North America, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America, respectively. In particular, the XBB recombinant has been detected in 25 countries and territories (across all subregions). Countries reporting the highest prevalence of XBB sequences in the past eight weeks are Guatemala (87.9%), Peru (77.0%), and Dominican Republic (68.8%). Among XBB sublineages, XBB.1.5 is the most prevalent at the regional level. XBB.1.5 was first detected in the USA at the end of October 2022 and model-based projections estimate it accounts for 66.4% (95% CI: 59.8-72.5%) of the US sequences in EW5 2023¹. XBB.1.5 has also been detected in 19 additional countries and territories of the Americas (Argentina,

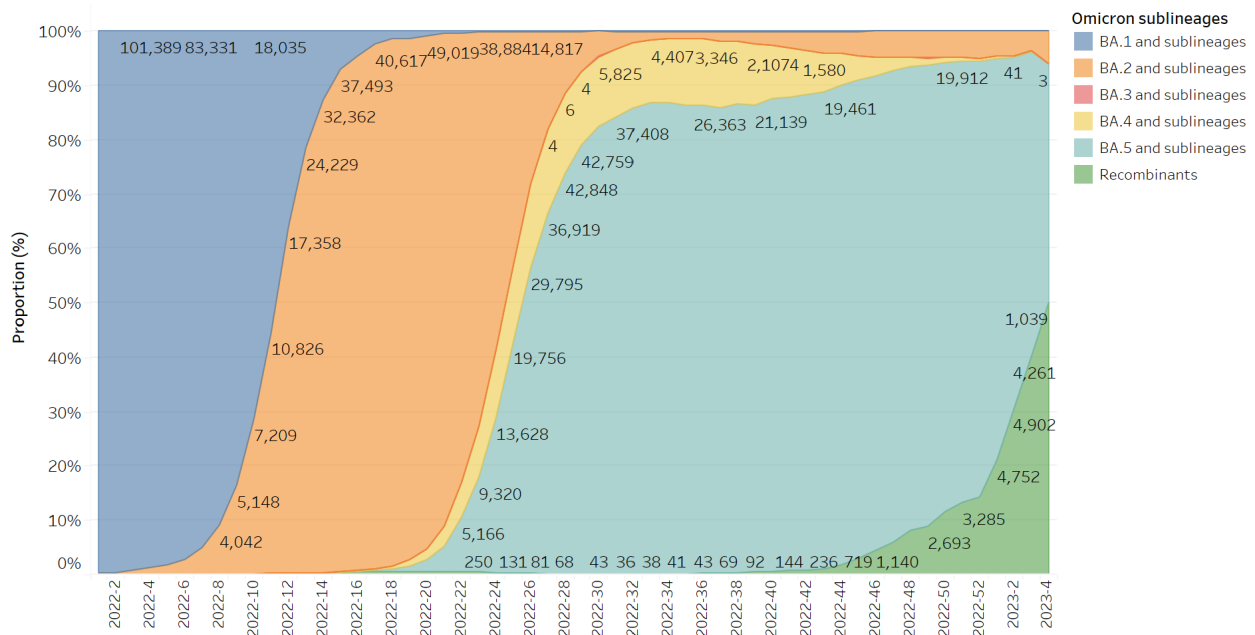
¹ US CDC. COVID Data Tracker - Variant Proportions. Available at: <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#variant-proportions>

Aruba, Bonaire, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Curacao, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sint Maarten, and Trinidad and Tobago).

An update rapid risk assessment for XBB.1.5 was published by WHO on 25 January². There is moderate-strength evidence for increased risk of transmission and immune escape but no early signals of increases in severity have been observed. Overall, available information does not suggest that XBB.1.5 has additional public health risks relative to the other currently circulating Omicron descendent lineages. Therefore, PAHO/WHO recommends the same precautions for XBB.1.5 as for other Omicron variants, including primary vaccination and boosters.

It is important to note that the number of SARS-CoV-2 sequences deposited in GISAID by PAHO Member States has significantly decreased compared to mid-2022. This decrease, which is also observed in other regions, increases the risk of bias in the sublineage prevalence estimates reported above and reduces our collective ability to timely identify new emerging lineages or new variants. In this context, **PAHO strongly encourages all countries in the Region to continue collecting representative samples for sequencing and to maintain appropriate COVID-19 genomic surveillance.**

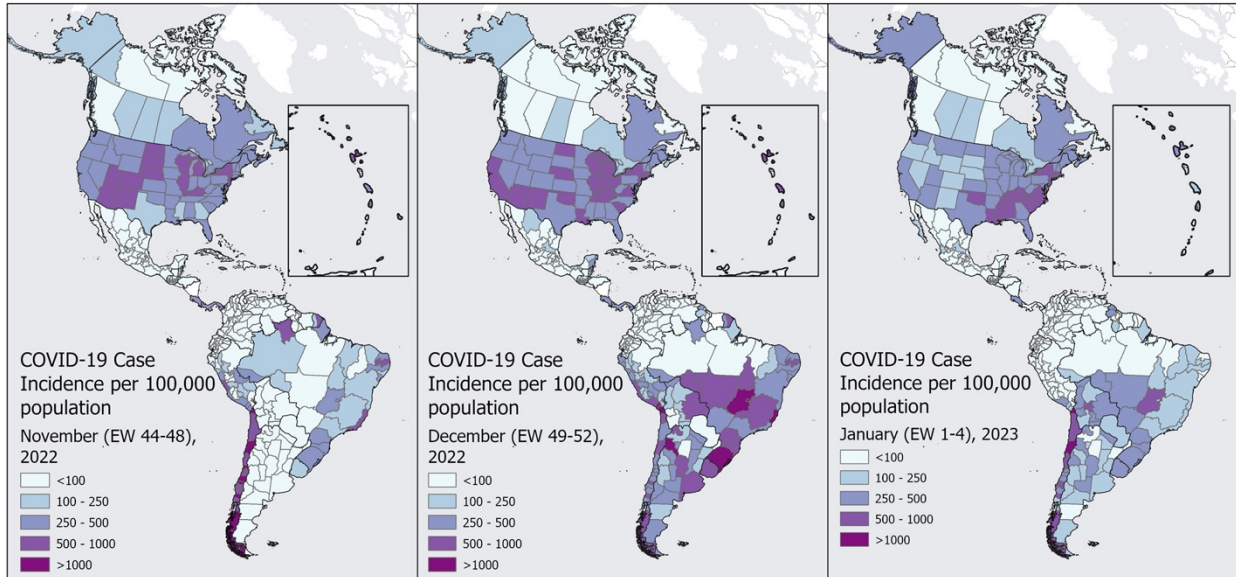
Figure 8. Proportions of VOC Omicron sublineages identified by the countries in the Region of the Americas (January 2022 - January 2023)



Source: GISAID

² WHO. XBB.1.5 Updated Rapid Risk Assessment, 25 January 2023. Available at: <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/25012023xbb.1.pdf>

Annex 1. The maps of monthly COVID-19 case incidence rates per 100,000 population. The region of the Americas. From November 2022 to January 2023.



This map (**Annex 1**) represents the COVID-19 case incidence per 100,000 population in the region of the Americas from November 2022 to January 2023.

In November 2022, the highest incidence rates were observed in the US, Brazil, Chile, Peru, French Guiana, and Puerto Rico. An increase in case incidence rates was observed in Panama in Central America, and in Chile and parts of Brazil (Rio de Janeiro) in South America compared to previous months. In North America and the Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands and territories, the overall incidence declined in this month.

There was an important increase in new cases in December 2022 in most of the countries and territories of the Americas. In North America, the largest relative increase was observed in Mexico followed by the US. In Central America, Panama, Costa Rica, Belize, and Guatemala presented the highest case incidence rates. Most countries in South America presented and increase in incidence rates, the largest relative increase was observed in Bolivia, Paraguay, and Argentina. In the Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean islands and territories the highest case incidence rates were observed in Puerto Rico and the French Guiana.

In January 2023, the highest incidence rates were observed in the US, Brazil, Chile, Bolivia, and Puerto Rico. All subregions presented a relative decline in incidence rate compared to the previous month.

Data are retro-adjusted every week and the numbers and percent changes of COVID-19 cumulative cases and deaths may not match with the previous COVID-19 weekly situational reports.