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## WEEKLY PRESS BRIEFING ON COVID-19 DIRECTOR'S REMARKS—10 MARCH 2021

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Good morning and thank you for joining today's press briefing.

As of this week, the Americas have been home to nearly 52 million cases and more than 1.2 million deaths from COVID-19, with more than a million of these cases reported in the last week alone.

The U.S., Canada and Mexico are continuing to report a drop in new infections, despite localized hotspots in the U.S. state of Virginia and Nunavut in Canada's northern territories, which is home to many indigenous peoples.

Across Central America, countries are experiencing a decline in infections, although areas of Guatemala and Panama's indigenous province of Guna Yala are reporting an increase in cases.

In the Caribbean, larger islands are continuing to see a drop in cases, while Cuba, the Bahamas, Saint Lucia and Guadeloupe are seeing a rise in infections.

In South America, Paraguay, Uruguay and Chile are reporting an increase in new cases. And while Peru and Bolivia are finally seeing declines, infections remain high.

Cases are on the rise in nearly every Brazilian state, and over the last week, the country reported its second-highest rate of infections and its deadliest day since the pandemic began, with 1,910 COVID-related deaths reported in just 24 hours.

The Brazilian state of Amazonas has been especially hard hit. A new variant first discovered late last year has led to a surge in new infections that have overwhelmed the health care system, which continues to experience widespread shortages of medical supplies, including oxygen.

We are concerned about the situation in Brazil. It provides a sober reminder of the threat of resurgence: areas hit hard by the virus in the past are still vulnerable to infection today.

That is why it's important to continue to monitor the virus and let data guide our actions. But we also cannot wait until our health systems are overwhelmed to implement public health measures – we must rely on these measures early and often to protect lives and our health systems.

I am happy to report that vaccinations continue across our region. More than 113 million people have received a COVID vaccine in the Americas as of this week, and more people are being vaccinated every day.

Over the weekend, the Bahamas welcomed its first COVID-19 vaccines thanks to a donation of 20,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine from the Government of India.

Peru has also received its first shipments of the Pfizer vaccine through COVAX.

Last week, Colombia became the first country in Latin America to receive vaccines via the COVAX mechanism. Today, these doses are being delivered to at-risk groups, including indigenous communities in the country's Amazon region.

Every country participating in COVAX has been informed about the number of doses they will be receiving through May of this year.

We've been very pleased with how quickly countries in our region have responded to COVAX agreements so they can begin to receive the 28.7 million doses that have been allocated to the Americas over the next three months.

Over the last week, our Revolving Fund has been working closely with Member States to accelerate access to COVID vaccines.

For over forty years, the PAHO Revolving Fund has helped the countries of the Americas protect people and reduce deaths from vaccine-preventable diseases, including polio, measles, yellow fever, bacterial pneumonia, influenza, rotavirus, and HPV.

Through the Revolving Fund, 41 countries and territories in the Americas have been able to pool their resources to purchase high-quality vaccines, syringes and related supplies for their populations at lower prices than they would pay on their own.

Our Revolving Fund represents the Americas within COVAX, and over the past weeks, our Fund has been receiving country advance payments, signed agreements with manufacturers, placed orders on behalf of our Member States and made the necessary preparations to deliver doses across our region.

In those cases where bridge funding is required to access COVID-19 vaccines on a timely basis, the Revolving Fund is working with countries to extend financial credits to facilitate the procurement process.

Thanks to our collective efforts, nearly 2.3 million COVAX doses will arrive in at least 7 countries in our region in the next days and weeks. And other countries are not far behind.

The challenge now is to continue to accelerate deliveries to those countries that have not yet received COVAX doses to ensure that all countries receive their initial installments of vaccines this month.

PAHO is not just focused on delivering these first few doses. We're also looking ahead to what it will take to ensure everyone in our region is protected, and we are providing as much information as possible on the timing of allocated doses for April, May and beyond.

To accompany the delivery of vaccines, the organization is accelerating the procurement of syringes and PPEs to ensure health workers across the Americas have the supplies they need to safely deliver COVID vaccines for months to come.

It's encouraging that vaccines have started to arrive across our region, but because doses are limited, most people will still have to wait several months before they're vaccinated.

During this time, we must remain cautious and protect ourselves by continuing to rely on the public health measures that have kept us safe through the worst surges of the pandemic.

The actions we take will determine how quickly the virus continues to spread, so we cannot let our guard down now when vaccines are so close.

PAHO is doing its part to help countries secure and deliver vaccines safely and as quickly as possible, but manufacturing limitations, low supply, and high demand for vaccines make this an uncertain situation. We must be patient, but we are being persistent in our pursuit of these vaccines.

In the meantime, we need everyone to collaborate as we work to keep ourselves, our families, and our communities safe.