Biweekly COVID-19 Epidemiological Update - Region of the Americas

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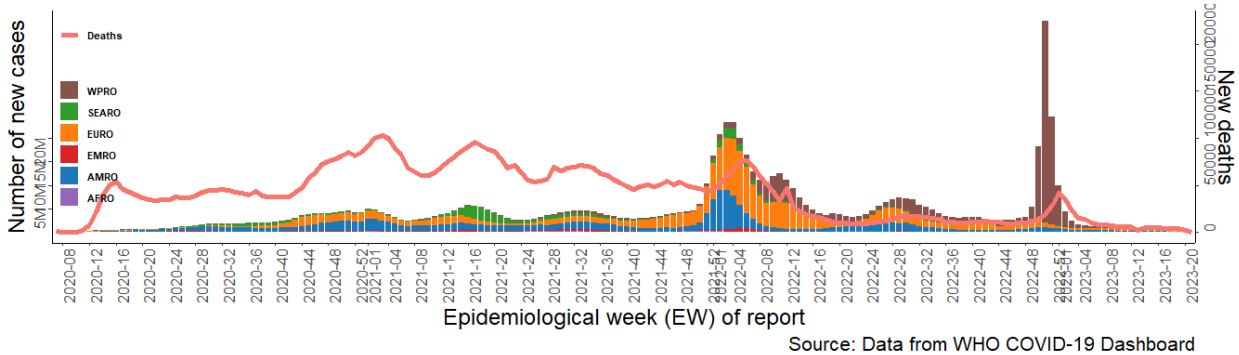
Contents:

Executive Summary

- **Since the onset of the pandemic** in 2020 and up to 31 May 2023, a cumulative total of 767 million COVID-19 cases including 6.9 million deaths were reported from all six WHO regions. During epidemiological weeks (EW) 20 & 21, cases and deaths decreased in all regions.
- **Globally,** approximately 529,151 new COVID-19 cases were reported in EW 20 & 21 (14 May 2023 – 27 May 2023) - a 55% decrease compared to EW 18 & 19 (30 April 2023 - 13 May 2023) (**Figure 1**). For the same period, about 2,786 new COVID-19 deaths were reported globally – a 68% relative decrease compared the previous two weeks.
- **In the region of the Americas,** 109,098 cases and 954 deaths were reported in EW 20 & 21 – a 61.6% decrease in cases and 79.1% decrease in deaths compared to the previous 2 weeks.
- At the subregional level, COVID-19 cases increased in 2 subregions (South America and Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands). Deaths decreased in all subregions.
- The overall biweekly case notification rate for the region of the Americas was 10.7 cases per 100,000 population during EW 20 & 21 (27.8 the previous 2 weeks).
- Among 17 countries/territories in the region with available data, **COVID-19 hospitalizations** increased in 6 countries and territories (range: 16.7% - 100%) during EW 20 & 21 compared to the previous 2 weeks. Among 12 countries and territories with available data, **COVID-19 ICU admissions** increased in 2 countries and territories (100% increase in both countries).

Figure 1: COVID-19 cases and deaths by epidemiological week (EW) of report and WHO region. EW 4 2020 - EW 20 & 21 2023.



Region of the Americas - An overview

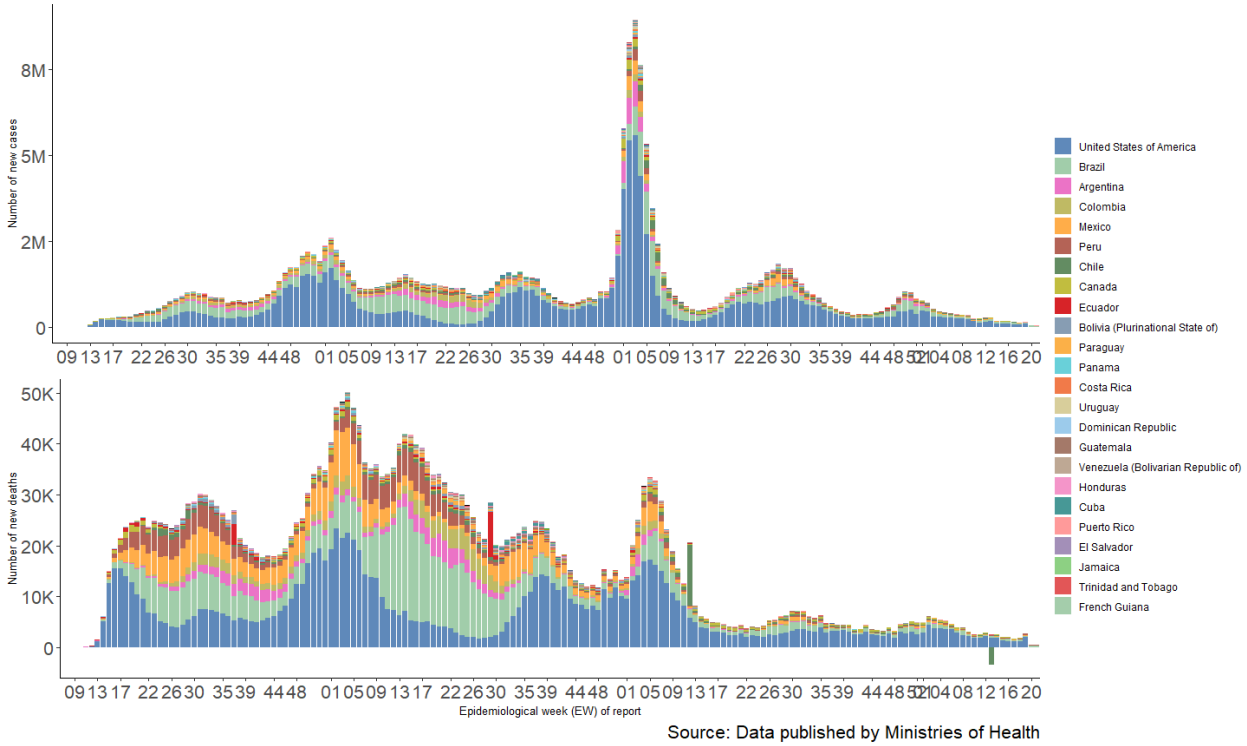
Data are retro-adjusted every week and the numbers and percent changes of COVID-19 cumulative cases and deaths may not match with the previous COVID-19 weekly situational reports.

Pan American Health Organization / World Health Organization. Washington, D.C.: PAHO/WHO; 2023

More information available at: https://paho-covid19-response-who.hub.arcgis.com/ & https://shiny.pahobra.org/wdc/

As of May 31, 2023, several countries in the region of the Americas have stopped reporting or updating public COVID-19 data. Some of these countries were major contributors in the share of new COVID-19 weekly cases and deaths at the regional level, thus the absence of new information for these countries may reflect an artificial drop in COVID-19 cases and deaths. Given the decreasing and varied reporting by Member States, caution should be exercised in interpreting this data.

Figure 2: COVID-19 cases and deaths by epidemiological week (EW) of report and country/territory. Region of the Americas. EW 3 2020 - 21 2023.



During EW 20 & 21, 109,098 new **COVID-19 cases** were reported in the region of the Americas - a relative decrease of 61.6% compared to previous 2 weeks **(Figure 2)**. The highest number of COVID-19 cases in the last 2 weeks was reported from South America (73,802 cases, 3% increase) compared to the previous 2 weeks. **(Table 1)**. During EW 20 & 21, the highest proportion of biweekly COVID-19 cases at the national level were reported by Brazil (67,107 new cases, 7.4% increase), Puerto Rico (13,819 new cases, 22.5% increase), Mexico (8,848 new cases, 41.2% decrease).

Table 1: Cases and deaths in EW 20 & 21 by subregion. Region of the Americas

Subregion	Total Cases	Total Deaths	Cases EW 20 & 21	Deaths EW 20 & 21
Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands	4,559,460	36,591	14,907	27
Central America	4,284,303	54,476	4,631	12
North America	115,728,455	1,513,684	15,758	128
South America	68,374,597	1,349,838	73,802	787

For the same period, 954 **COVID-19 deaths** were reported in the region of the Americas - a relative decrease of 79.1% compared to previous 2 weeks **(Figure 2)**. The highest number of COVID-19 deaths in the last 2 weeks was reported from South America (787 deaths, 29% decrease) **(Table 1)**. At the national level, the highest proportion of biweekly COVID-19

deaths were reported by Brazil (548 new deaths, 11.9% decrease), Peru (157 new deaths, 60.2% decrease), and Canada (88 new deaths, 59.8% decrease).

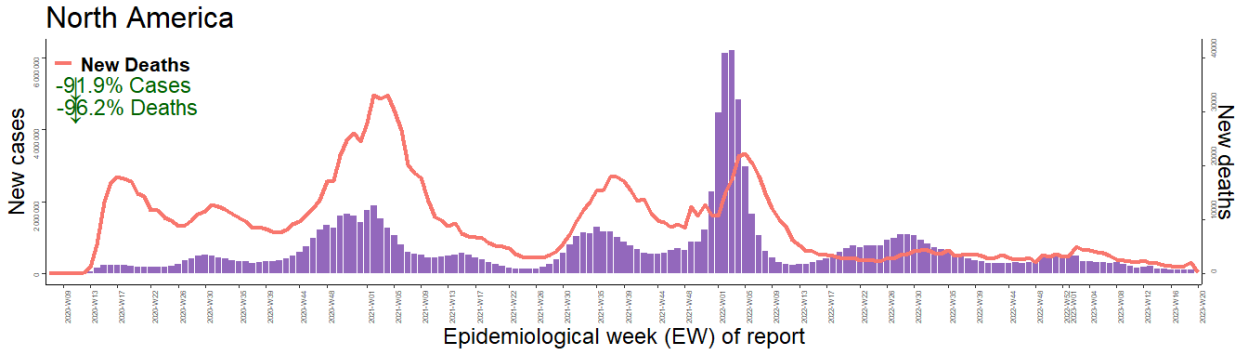
During EW 20 & 21, among the 17 countries in the region with available data, 6 countries reported an increase in **COVID-19 hospitalizations** (range: 16.7% - 100%) compared to the previous 2 weeks. 2 countries in the region reported an increase in **COVID-19 ICU admissions** (both reporting 100% increase). The countries with largest increase in COVID-19 hospitalizations in EW 20 & 21 compared to the previous 2 weeks were Honduras (100% increase, with 4 hospitalizations reported in EW 20 & 21), and Guyana (100% increase, with 2 hospitalizations reported in EW 20 & 21). The largest increase in **COVID-19 ICU admissions** were observed in Cuba (100% increase, with 2 ICU admissions reported in EW 20 & 21), and Honduras (100% increase, with 1 ICU admission reported in EW 20 & 21) (note that both countries reported 0 ICU admissions in the previous 2 week-period).

A summary of the COVID-19 trends for EW 20 & 21 by subregion is presented below.

North America

The overall trends for COVID-19 cases have been decreasing in North America as of EW 20 & 21. Important to note though that as of May 11, 2023, the United States of America discontinued reporting of new COVID-19 cases and deaths, resulting in artificial drop in number of new cases and deaths, and relative change in both indicators for the sub-region. During EW 20 & 21, decline in cases were reported in Mexico (8,848 cases, 41.2% decrease), and Canada (6,910 cases, 26.5% decrease).

Figure 3: COVID-19 cases and deaths by epidemiological week (EW). **North America.** Region of the Americas. EW 3 2020 - EW 21 2023.

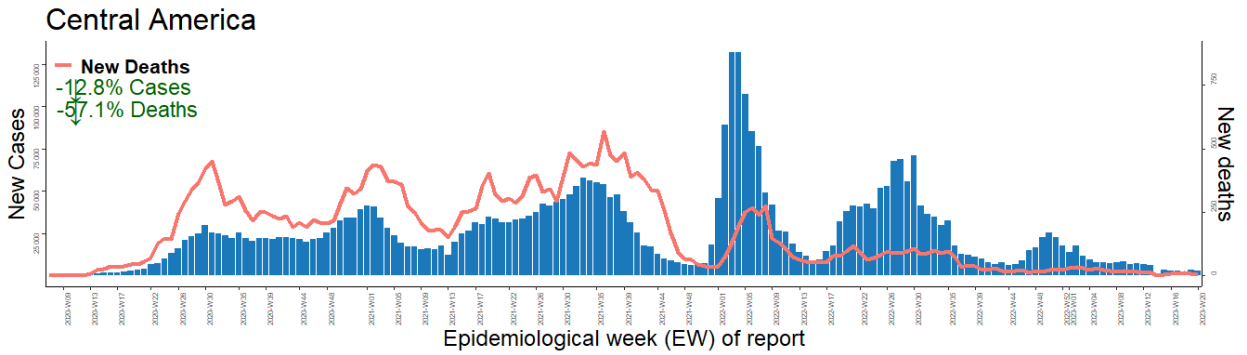


For the same period, **biweekly COVID-19 deaths** decreased by 96.2% in North America during EW 20 & 21 relative to the previous 2 weeks. Decline in deaths were reported in Canada (88 new deaths, 59.8% decrease), and Mexico (40 new deaths, 48.1% decrease).

Central America

In Central America, the overall **COVID-19 incidence** for the sub-region is on a downward trend with 4,631 new cases being reported during EW 20 & 21 – a 12.8% decrease compared to the previous 2 weeks **(Figure 4)**.

Figure 4: COVID-19 cases and deaths by epidemiological week (EW). **Central America. Region of the Americas.** EW 6 2020 - EW 20 & 21 2023.



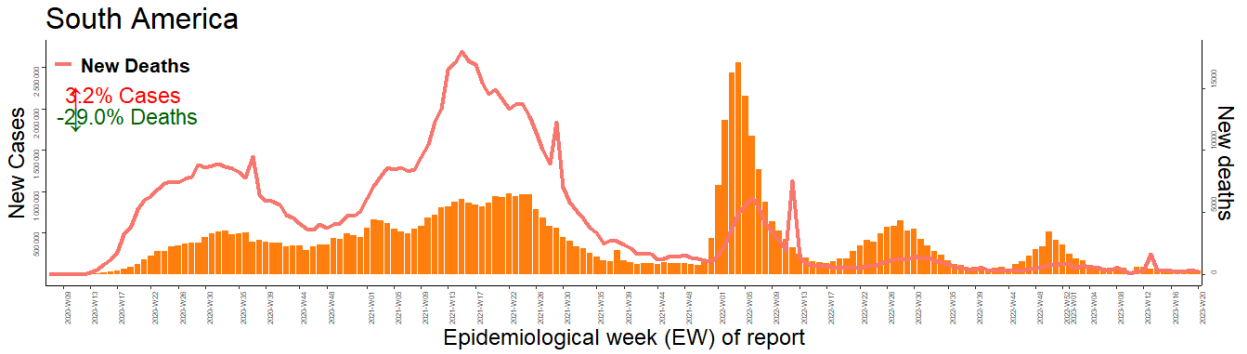
The countries with the largest decline in cases these 2 weeks included Honduras (25 new cases, 59% decrease), Panama (664 new cases, 46.7% decrease), and Guatemala (1,902 new cases, 9.3% decrease).

During EW 20 & 21, **biweekly deaths** decreased by approximately 57.1% relative to the previous 2-week period **(Figure 4)** with none of the seven countries and territories reporting an increase.

South America

In South America, the overall **COVID-19 incidence** for the subregion has increased by 3.2% compared to the previous 2-week period, with a total of 73,802 new COVID-19 cases being reported during EW 20 & 21 **(Figure 5)**.

Figure 5: COVID-19 cases and deaths by epidemiological week (EW). **South America. Region of the Americas.** EW 3 2020 - EW 20 & 21 2023.



Out of the 10 countries and territories the sub-region, 4 experienced an increase in cases during EW 20 & 21 with the largest proportion of reported cases being reported by Brazil (67,107 new cases, 7.4% increase), followed by Peru (2,143 new cases, 47.6% decrease), and Colombia (1,606 new cases, 18.3% increase).

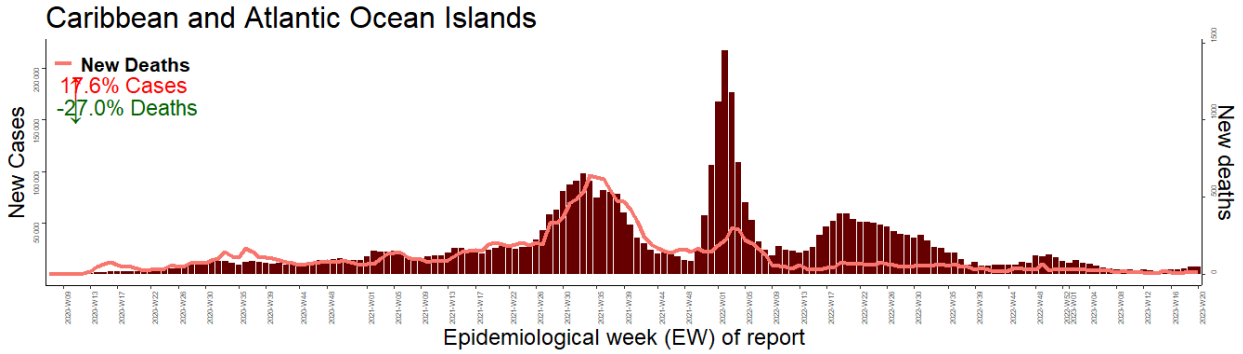
During EW 20 & 21, a total of 787 **COVID-19 deaths** were reported in South America – a 29% decrease compared to the previous 2 weeks. The largest decline in deaths were reported by Peru (157 new deaths, 60.2% decrease), followed by Bolivia (Plurinational State of) (2 new deaths, 60% decrease), and Chile (50 new deaths, 32.4% decrease). Colombia and Uruguay both reported relative increase in deaths, with respectively 21 and 9 deaths reported in the past two weeks, representing 50% increase for Colombia and 100% increase for Uruguay.

Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands

In the Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands sub-region, **COVID-19 cases** increased by 17.6% (14,907 new cases) compared to the previous 2 weeks **(Figure 6)**. At the national level, cases increased in 10 out of the 34 countries and territories in the subregion (range: 22.5% - 100%) while they declined in the remaining 10 countries and territories with

available data (range: -100% - -7.3%) (note that 8 out of 10 countries with 100% decline in cases reported no cases in the past two weeks, which might reflect a change in reporting schedule for these countries rather than true decline).

Figure 6: COVID-19 cases and deaths by epidemiological week (EW). **Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands.** Region of the Americas. EW 6 2020 - EW 20 & 21 2023.



For the same period, **COVID-19 deaths** decreased by 27.0% (27 deaths) in the Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands subregion. 3 countries observed a relative increase in their biweekly deaths in EW 20 & 21 compared to the previous 2 weeks (Jamaica, Martinique, and Suriname). Reported deaths either remained the same or declined in the remaining countries and territories of the subregion (range: -100 – -57.7%).

Immunization

Figure 7: Monthly uptake and historical coverage for COVID-19 vaccinations by dose.

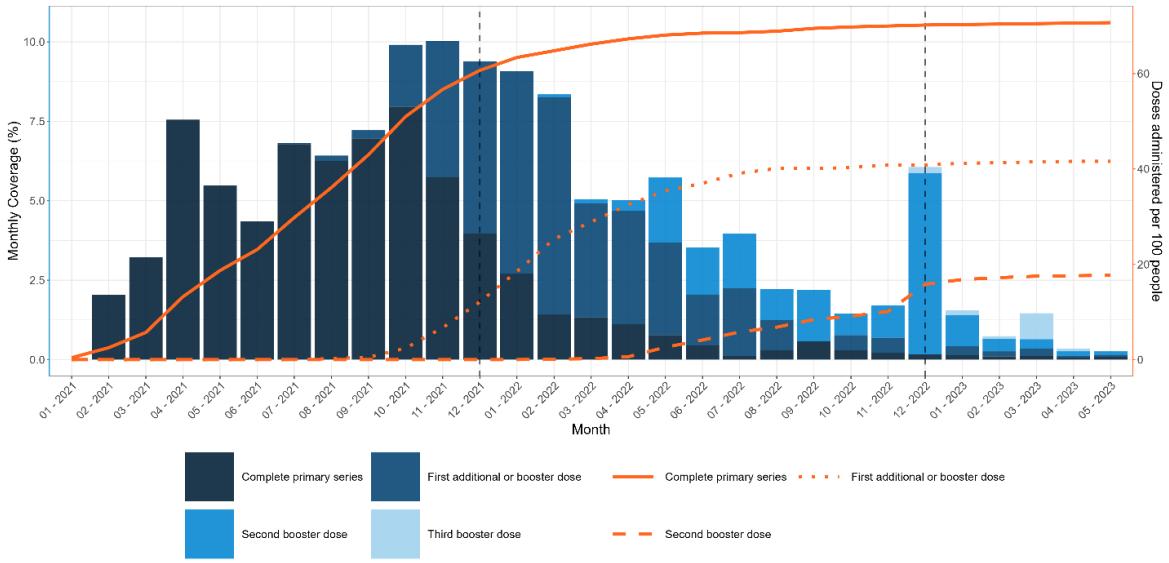


Figure 7 shows the monthly uptake and coverage[1] for COVID-19 vaccination in the Region of the Americas from the start of vaccination operations in January 2021 to May 2023. The application of a third booster dose began in some countries and territories in November 2022. Coverage increase has plateaued for all doses reported in the figure. It is evident that monthly coverage for the Complete Primary Series and First Additional or Booster Dose have remained stagnant – that is, below a 0.5% monthly uptake – since October 2022.

[1] 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

Genomic surveillance in the PAHO region

Through PAHO's Genomic Surveillance Regional Network and the work of Member States, 573,002 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 30 May 2023.

The vast majority of SARS-CoV-2 viruses circulating globally belong to sublineages of Omicron. According to the Pango Network nomenclature, Omicron comprises the BA.1 to BA.5 sublineages, which are in turn subdivided into diverse sublineages based on additional mutations that slightly change their genomic profile. Multiple sublineages arising from recombinations involving Omicron viruses have also been described and they now make up the majority of the circulating SARS-CoV-2 viruses worldwide.

Starting 15 March 2023, the WHO variant tracking system considers the classification of Omicron sublineages independently as **variants under monitoring** (VUM), **variants of interest** (VOIs), or **variants of concern** (VOCs), while Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta and the Omicron original lineages are classified as "previously circulating" VOCs[2]. At present, in this classification, no lineage is classified as currently circulating VOC. The recombinant sublineage XBB.1.5 and XBB.1.16 were classified as currently circulating VOIs in January and April 2023, respectively. Risk assessments for both VOIs have been published[3,4]. These risk assessments found that available information does not suggest that XBB.1.5 nor XBB.1.16 have additional public health risk relative to XBB and the other currently circulating Omicron descendent lineages. Additionally, BQ.1 (a BA.5 sublineage), BA.2.75 and CH.1.1 (two BA.2 sublineages), and XBB, XBB.1.9.1, and XBB.1.9.2 are classified as currently circulating VUMs.

Since the introduction of Omicron in the Americas, different sublineages have been predominant and have then progressively been replaced by new sublineages (Fig. X1). Currently, most circulating viruses belong to recombinant lineages and, to a lesser extent, BA.5 sublineages, with some circulation of BA.2 sublineages (Fig. X1). In fact, in the past eight weeks, recombinant lineages represented 94.7%, 95.6%, 99.1%, and 97.7% of the characterized samples in North America, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America, respectively. During the same period, BA.5 sublineages represented 3.6%, 1.2%, 0.9% and 2.1% of the characterized samples in North America, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America, respectively.

Within these main sublineages, most viruses currently circulating in the Americas correspond to VOI XBB.1.5 and, to a lesser extent, VUMs XBB.1.9.1 and XBB.1.9.2, and VOI XBB.1.16. Since 26 March 2023, **VOI XBB.1.5** (and sublineages) represented 71.9%, 74.8%, 89.7%, and 59.0% of the characterized samples in North America, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America, respectively. However, the proportion of XBB.1.5 has been decreasing over the past few weeks (Fig. X1). The proportion of **VOI XBB.1.16** (and sublineages) and VUMs **XBB.1.9.1 and XBB.1.9.2** (and sublineages) has been increasing during the past few weeks (Fig. X1), in particular in North America. Since 26 March 2023, XBB.1.16 (and sublineages) represented 5.8%, 3.0%, 1.5% and 0.2% of the characterized samples in North America, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America, respectively. During the same period, **VUMs XBB.1.9.1 and XBB.1.9.2** (combined and including sublineages) represented 6.9%, 7.3%, 1.5%, and 1.0% of the characterized samples in North America, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America, respectively (Fig. X1). Model-based projections estimate that XBB.1.5, XBB.1.16, XBB.1.9.1, and XBB.1.9.2, represent 57.5%, 19.0%, 11.8%, and 6.1% of the US sequences in the two-week period ending 27 May 2023[5].

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[2] WHO. Statement on the update of WHO's working definitions and tracking system for SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern and variants of interest. 16 March 2023. Available at: https://www.who.int/news/item/16-03-2023-statement-on-the-update-of-who-s-working-definitions-and-tracking-system-for-sars-cov-2-variants-of-concern-and-variants-of-interest

[3] WHO. XBB.1.5 Updated Rapid Risk Assessment, 24 February 2023. Available at: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/22022024xbb.1.5ra.pdf

[4] WHO. XBB.1.16 Initial Risk Assessment. 17 April 2023. Available at: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/21042023xbb.1.16ra-v2.pdf

[5] US CDC. COVID Data Tracker - Variant Proportions. Available at: https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#variant-proportions

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 (Fig. X2). 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 Omicron main sublineages and selected recombinant variants of interest (XBB.1.5 and XBB.1.16) and variants under monitoring (XBB.1.9.1 and XBB.1.9.2) identified by the countries in the Region of the Americas (January 2022 – May 2023)

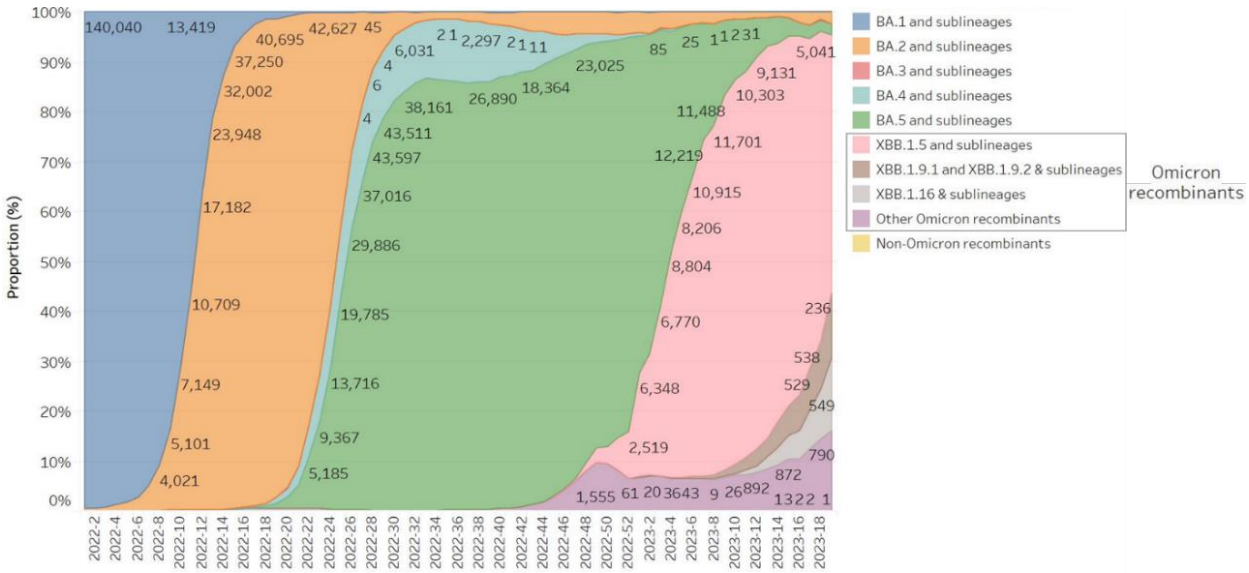
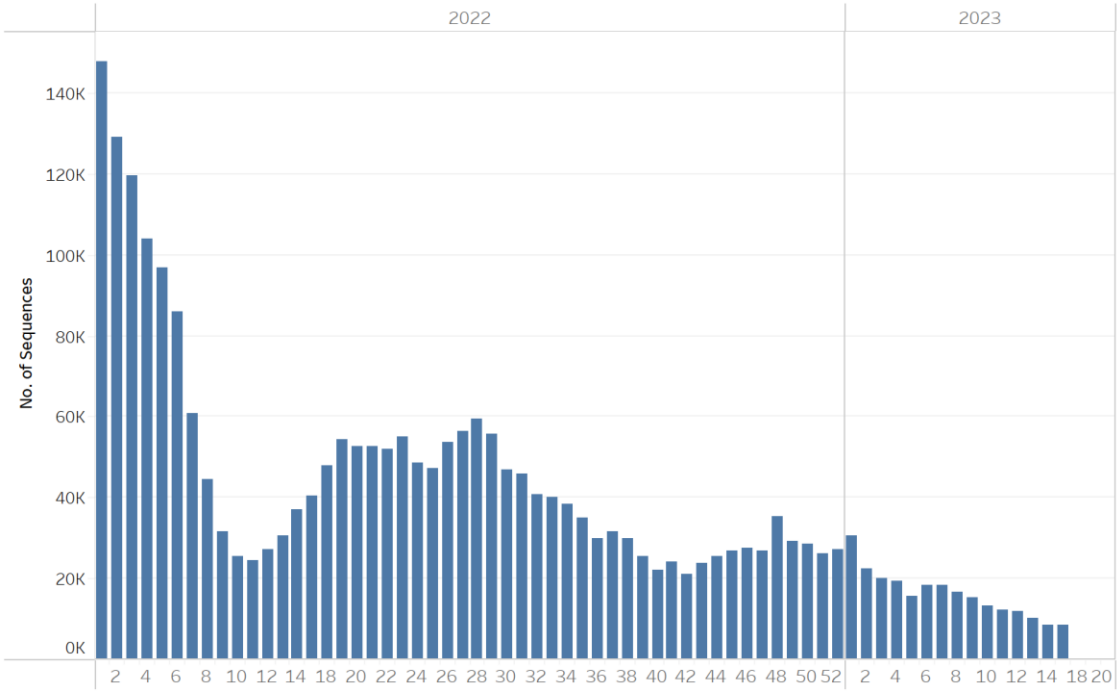
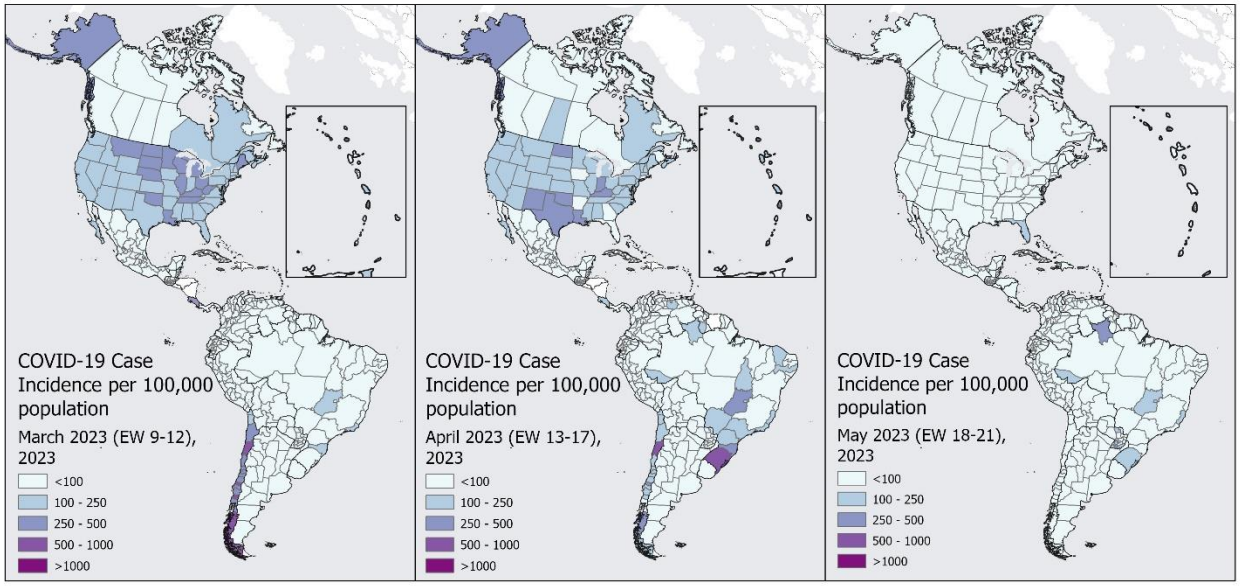


Figure 9. Number of weekly sequences generated in the Region of the Americas (January 2022 – May 2023)



Annex 1: COVID-19 incidence rate per 100,000 population in the region of the Americas from March 2023 to May 2023



0 1,000 2,000 4,000 km

These maps represent the COVID-19 case incidence per 100,000 population in the region of the Americas from March 2023 to May 2023.

In March, most countries and territories of the Americas presented incident rates under 500 cases per 100,000 population, except Chile where some regions (Aysen, Magallanes y de la Antarctica Chilena, Rios, Nuble, and Atacama) showed incident rates between 500 and 1,000 cases per 100,000 pop.

In April, a slight increase in incident rates was observed in some countries and territories (Brazil, Venezuela, and Guyana). The highest incident rates in the region were found in Atacama in Chile, and in the State of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil.

In May, all subregions presented a relative decline in incidence rate compared to the previous month. Incident rates with over 250 cases per 100,000 population were only observed in the state of Roraima in Brazil. This data should be examined carefully as many countries and territories have stopped reporting COVID-19 cases on a regular basis.

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.