

Monthly COVID-19 Epidemiological Update - Region of the Americas

Issue published 02 August 2023

Contents:

- Executive summary including global overview
- Regional and sub-regional trends
- Immunization
- Genomic Surveillance

Executive Summary

Epidemiological trends below are presented using a 4-week interval, comparing the past four complete epidemiological weeks (EW 27-30 2023; 02 July 2023 – 29 July 2023) to the previous four epidemiological weeks (EW 23-26 2023; 04 June 2023 - 01 July 2023). Data presented in this report should be interpreted with caution, given the global reduction in COVID-19 testing and frequency of epidemiological updates.

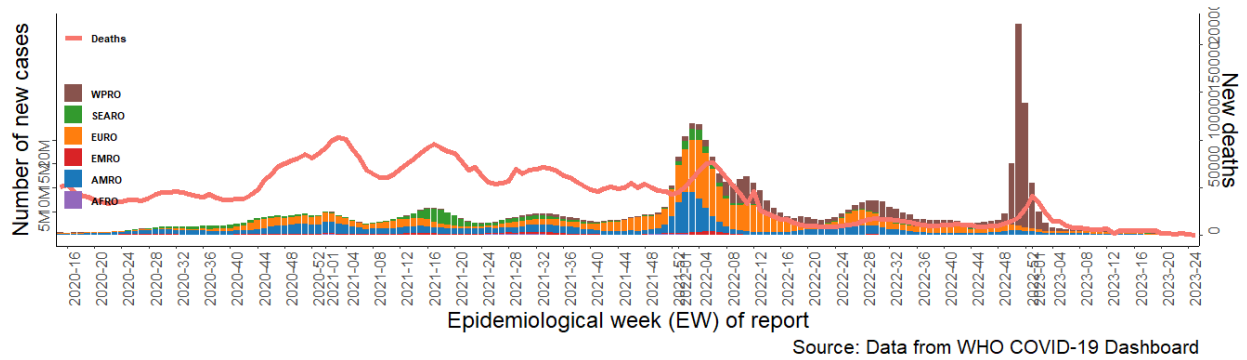
PAHO/WHO has stopped collecting country and subnational level COVID-19 data as of 1 August 2023 and therefore our regular Epidemiological Update will no longer be published. Subsequent COVID-19 surveillance will continue through the Influenza and Other Respiratory Viruses bulletin and dashboards available here: <https://www.paho.org/en/topics/influenza-and-other-respiratory-viruses>

- **Since the onset of the pandemic** in 2020 and up to 02 August 2023, a cumulative total of 768,983,095 COVID-19 cases including 6,953,743 deaths were reported from all six WHO regions. In EW 27-30 2023, approximately 1,336,321 new COVID-19 cases were reported globally; a -29.2% change compared to EW 23-26 2023. For the same period, 3,392 new COVID-19 deaths were reported globally; a -30.4% change compared the previous four-week period (**Figure 1**).
- During EW 27-30, 2023, cases decreased in 4 WHO regions while they increased in WPRO and AFRO, and deaths decreased in 4 WHO regions while they increased in SEARO and AFRO.
- **In the region of the Americas**, a cumulative total 193,209,590 cases and 2,958,859 deaths were reported. In EW 27-30 2023, the Region reported 86,451 cases (-30.8%) and 1,417 deaths (-28.5%). At the subregional level, COVID-19 cases increased in Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands. Deaths increased in Central America and Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands.
- The overall monthly case notification rate for the region of the Americas was 8.5 cases per 100,000 population during EW 27-30 (12.2 the previous 4 weeks). Between EW 23-26 and EW 27-30, the 8-week COVID-19 death rate was 3.3 deaths per 1 million population (6.3 the previous eight weeks).

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.

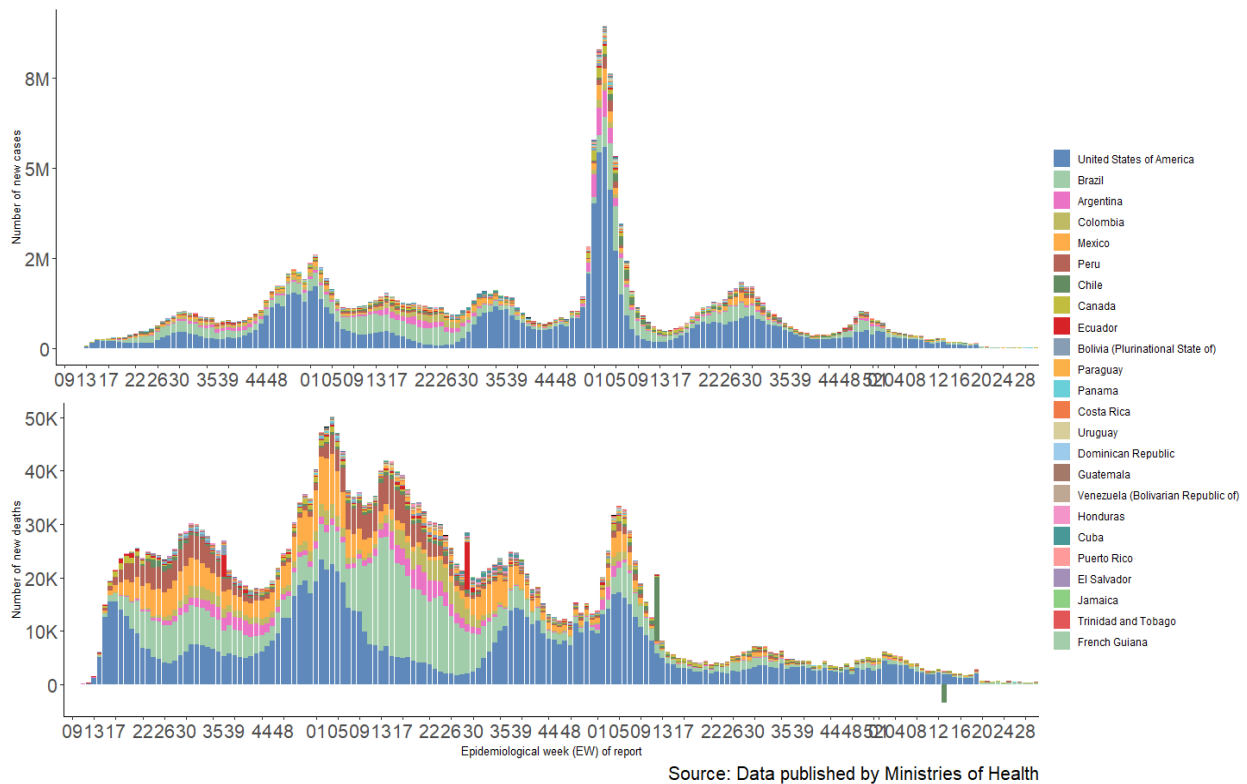
- Among 12 countries/territories in the region with available data, **COVID-19 hospitalizations** increased in 4 countries and territories (range: 7.4% - 100%) during EW 27-30 compared to the previous 4 weeks. Among 11 countries and territories with available data, **COVID-19 ICU admissions** increased in 2 countries and territories (range: 35.3% - 150%).

Figure 1: COVID-19 cases and deaths by epidemiological week (EW) of report and WHO region. EW 4 2020 - EW 30 2023.



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 - 30 2023.



During EW 27-30, 86,451 new **COVID-19 cases** were reported in the region of the Americas, a -30.8% change compared to previous 4 weeks (**Figure 2**). The highest number of COVID-19 cases in the last 4 weeks was reported from South America (58,512 new cases; -32%). (**Table 1**). During EW 27-30, the highest proportion of monthly COVID-19 cases at the national level were reported by Brazil (45,642 new cases; -34.9%), Guatemala (9,530 new cases; +15.5%), and Canada (5,746 new cases; -40.6%).

Table 1: Cases and deaths in EW 27-30 by subregion. Region of the Americas

Subregion	Total Cases	Total Deaths	Cases EW 27 - 30	Deaths EW 27 - 30
Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands	4,573,744	36,684	6,554	68
Central America	4,320,382	54,605	15,639	81
North America	115,767,651	1,514,635	5,746	112
South America	68,547,748	1,352,934	58,512	1,156

For the same period, 1,417 **COVID-19 deaths** were reported in the region of the Americas, a -28.5% change compared to previous 4 weeks (**Figure 2**). The highest number of COVID-19 deaths in the last 4 weeks was reported from South America (1,156 new deaths, -24%) (**Table 1**). At the national level, the highest proportion of monthly COVID-19 deaths were reported by Brazil (695 new deaths, -34.2%), Peru (321 new deaths, +28.4%), and Canada (112 new deaths, -63.4%).

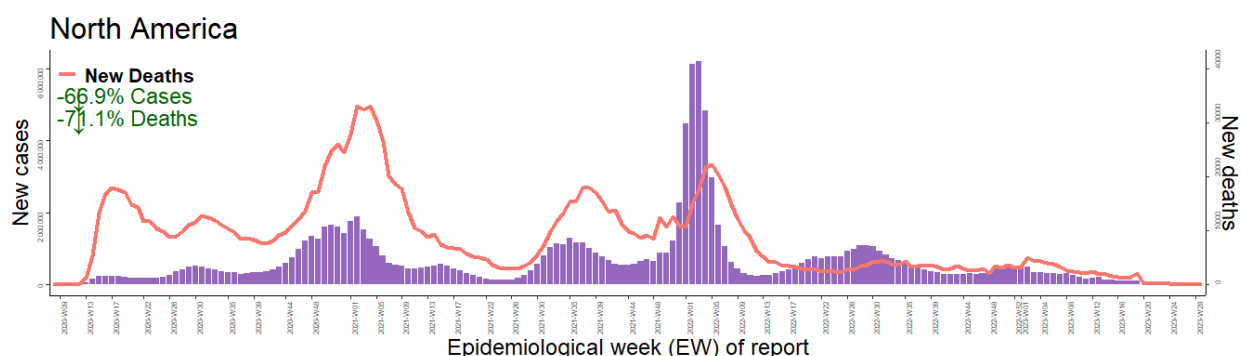
During EW 27-30, among the 12 countries and territories in the region with available data, Guyana, Puerto Rico, Suriname and Dominican Republic reported an increase in **COVID-19 hospitalizations** (range: 7.4% - 100%) compared to the previous 4 weeks. Puerto Rico and Uruguay reported an increase in **COVID-19 ICU admissions** (range: 35.3% - 150%).

A summary of the COVID-19 trends for EW 27-30 by subregion is presented below.

North America

The overall trends for COVID-19 cases have been decreasing in North America as of EW 27-30. During EW 27-30, the largest decline in cases were reported by Mexico, followed by Canada.

Figure 3: COVID-19 cases and deaths by epidemiological week (EW). **North America.** Region of the Americas. EW 3 2020 - EW 30 2023.



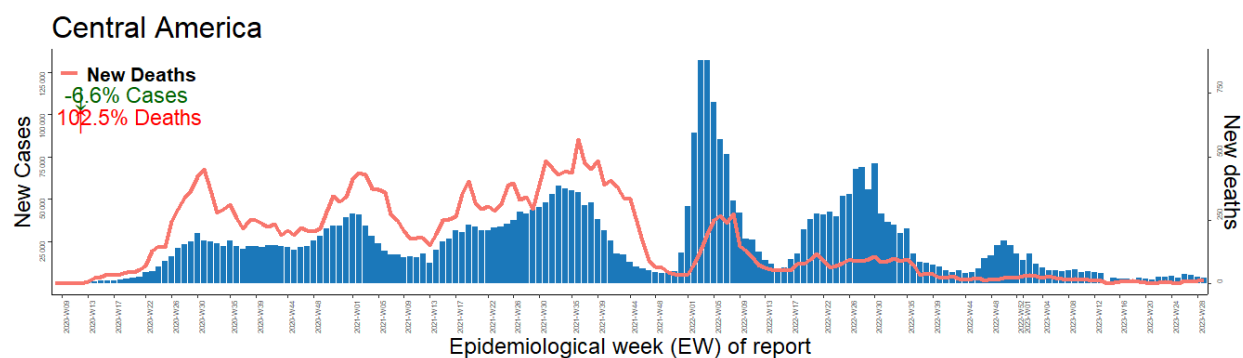
For the same period, **monthly COVID-19 deaths** decreased by -71.1% in North America during EW 27-30 relative to the previous 4 weeks. The largest decline in deaths were reported by Canada (112 new deaths, -63.4%).

Central America

In Central America, the overall **COVID-19 incidence** for the sub-region is on a downward trend with 15,639 new cases being reported during EW 27-30 – a -6.6% change compared to the previous 4 weeks (**Figure 4**).

The countries with the largest decline in cases these 4 weeks included Panama (2,356 new cases, -50.2%), Costa Rica (2,087 new cases, -37%), and Nicaragua (104 new cases, -26.2%). During EW 27-30, **monthly deaths** increased by approximately 102.5% relative to the previous 4-week period (**Figure 4**) with 3 out of the seven countries reporting an increase (range: 75 – 350%).

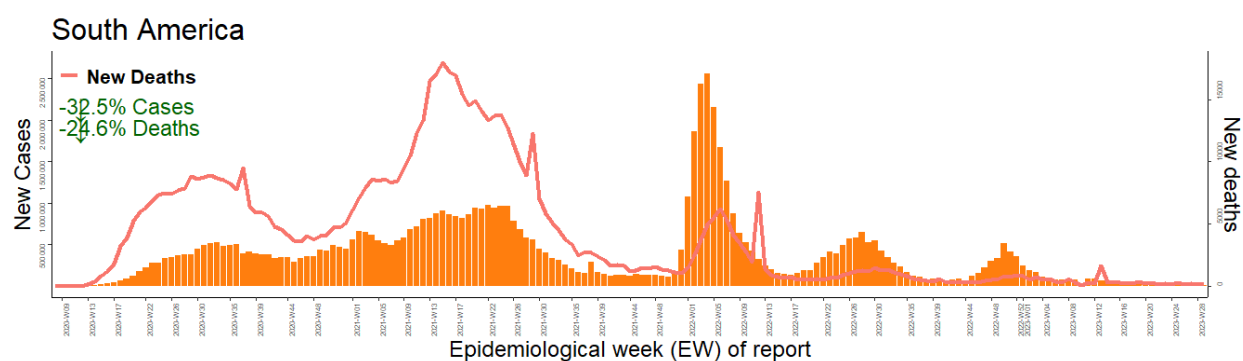
Figure 4: COVID-19 cases and deaths by epidemiological week (EW). Central America. Region of the Americas. EW 6 2020 - EW 30 2023.



South America

In South America, the overall **COVID-19 incidence** for the subregion has decreased by -32.5%, with a total of 58,512 new COVID-19 cases being reported during EW 27-30 compared to the previous 4-week period (**Figure 5**).

Figure 5: COVID-19 cases and deaths by epidemiological week (EW). South America. Region of the Americas. EW 3 2020 - EW 30 2023.



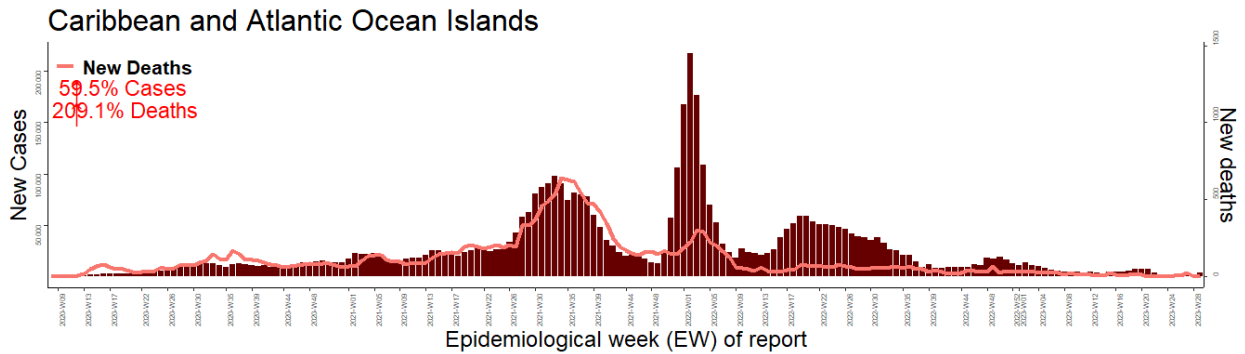
Out of the 10 countries and territories the sub-region, Peru experienced an increase in cases during EW 27-30 with the largest decline in cases being reported by Ecuador (767 new cases, -78.5%), followed by Chile (449 new cases, -39.8%), and Brazil (45,642 new cases, -34.9%).

During EW 27-30, a total of 1,156 **COVID-19 deaths** were reported in South America – a -24.6% change compared to the previous 4 weeks. The largest decline in deaths were reported by Chile (22 new deaths, -60%) and Ecuador (5 new deaths, -54.5%).

Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands

In the Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands subregion, **COVID-19 cases** increased by 59.5% (6,554 new cases) compared to the previous 4 weeks (**Figure 6**). At the national level, cases increased in 3 out of the 34 countries and territories in the subregion (range: 90.8% - 221.2%) while they declined in the remaining 13 countries and territories. For the same period, **COVID-19 deaths** increased by 209.1% (68 deaths) in the Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands subregion.

Figure 6: COVID-19 cases and deaths by epidemiological week (EW). Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands. Region of the Americas. EW 6 2020 - EW 30 2023.



Immunization

Figure 7: Number of countries/territories that reported their updated COVID-19 vaccination data to PAHO, by epidemiological week.

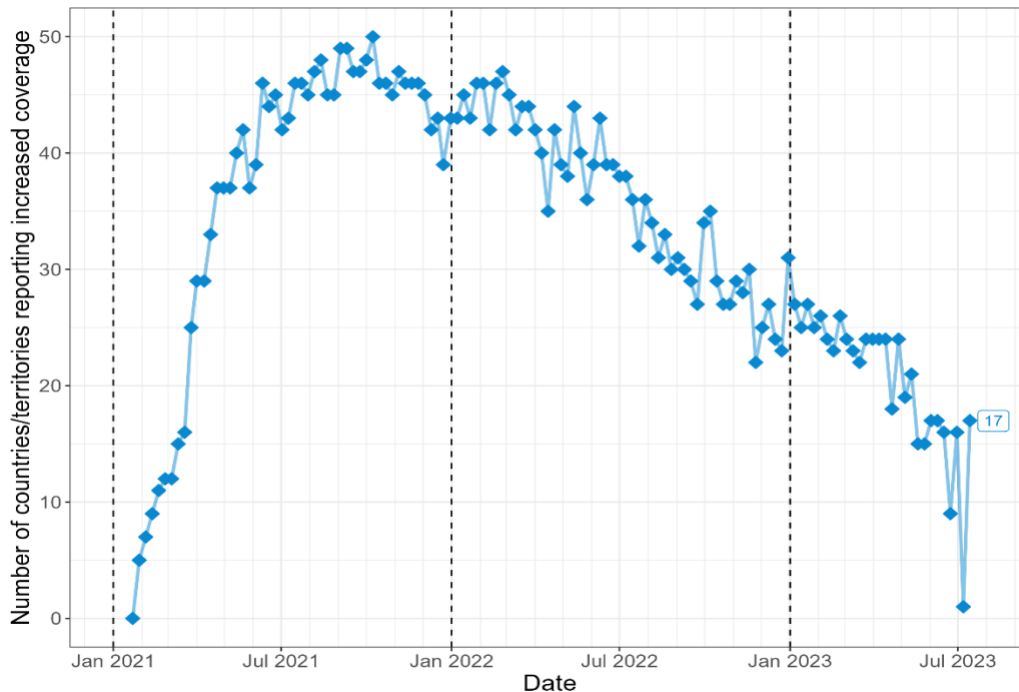


Figure 7 showcases the cumulative reporting trend for COVID-19 vaccination data from the countries/territories of the Americas, specifically for the Complete Primary Series. Since both vaccination and reporting rates declined throughout 2022, a downwards trend can be observed for all of 2022 and 2023. By mid-July 2023, only 17 countries and territories reported their coverage data for the Complete Primary Series.

Genomic surveillance

Through PAHO's Genomic Surveillance Regional Network and the work of Member States, 585,751 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 1st August 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” VOCs¹. 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^{2,3}. These risk assessments found that available information does not suggest that neither XBB.1.5 nor XBB.1.16 have additional public health risk relative to XBB and the other currently circulating Omicron descendent lineages. Additionally, BA.2.75 and CH.1.1 (two BA.2 sublineages), and recombinants XBB, XBB.1.9.1, XBB.1.9.2, and XBB.2.3 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 (Figure 8). Currently, most circulating viruses belong to recombinant lineages and, to a lesser extent to BA.2 and BA.5 sublineages (Figure. 8). In fact, in the past eight weeks, recombinant lineages represented 97.4%, 98.7%, 99.2%, and 99.6% of the characterized samples in North America, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America, respectively.

Within the recombinant lineages, 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. In the past eight weeks, **VOI XBB.1.5** (and sublineages) represented 33.2%, 47.6%, 68.9%, and 68.1% 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 months, while the proportions of **VOI XBB.1.16** (and sublineages) and **VUMs XBB.1.9.1, XBB.1.9.2, and XBB.2.3** (and their respective sublineages) have been increasing (Figure 8). In the past eight weeks, XBB.1.16 (and sublineages) represented 22.3%, 9.4%, 6.5% and 1.4% 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 21.9%, 23.0%, 4.4%, and 4.8% of the characterized samples in North America, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America, respectively (Figure 8) and VUM XBB.2.3 represented 4.3%, 0.8%, 3.2%, and 0.1% of the characterized samples in North America, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America, respectively. Model-based projections estimate that XBB.1.5, XBB.1.16, XBB.1.9.1, XBB.1.9.2, represent 17.8%, 32.9%,

¹ 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>

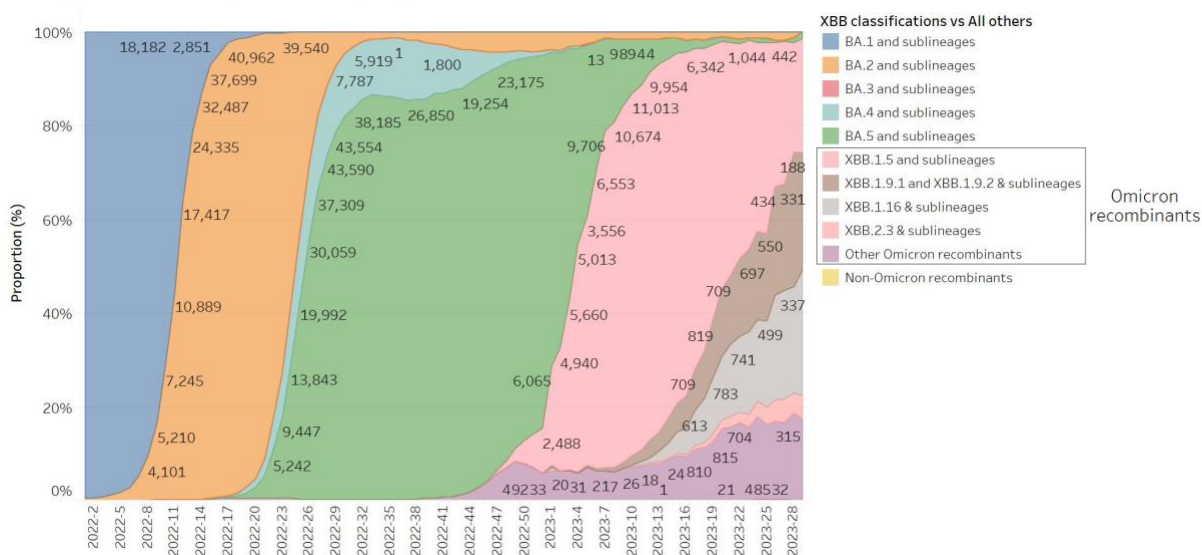
² WHO. XBB.1.5 Updated Rapid Risk Assessment, 24 February 2023. Available at: <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/22022024xbb.1.5ra.pdf>

³ 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>

13.2%, and 17.0% of the US sequences in the two-week period ending 22 July 2023⁴. Additionally, VUM XBB.2.3 has been increasing in proportion over the past few weeks in the US and is projected to represent 13.0% of the sequences in the same two-week period.

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 (Figure. 9). 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, XBB.1.9.2 and XBB.2.3) identified by the countries in the Region of the

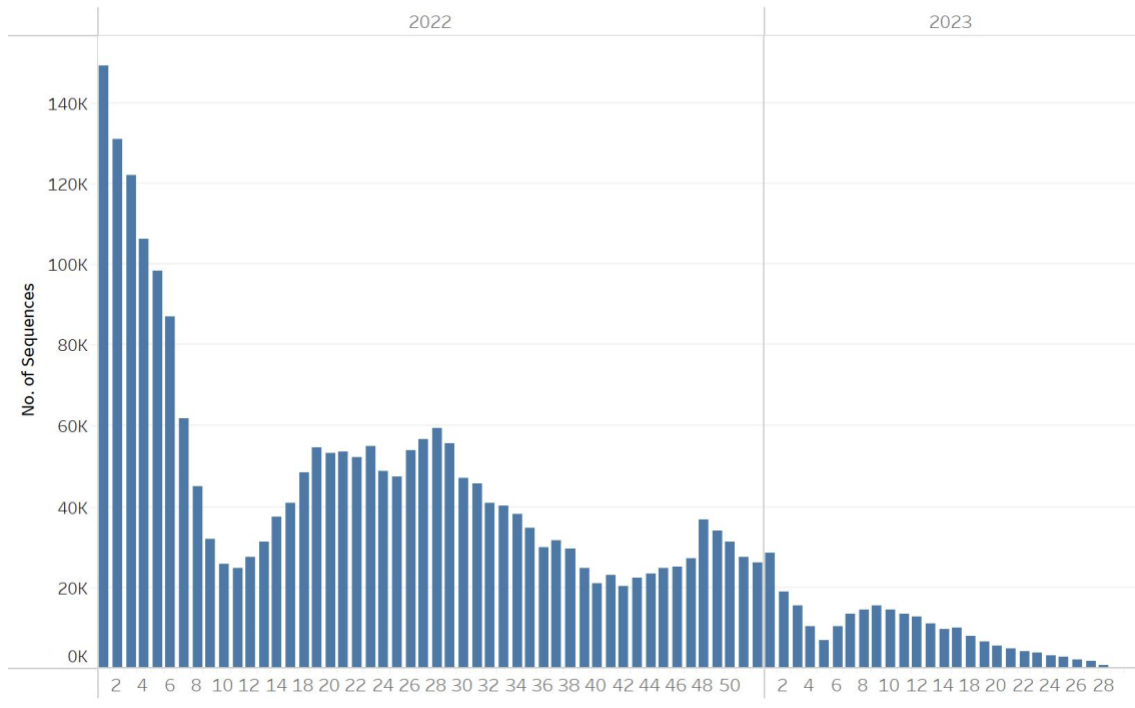


Americas (January 2022 – July 2023)

Source: GISAID

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

⁴ US CDC. COVID Data Tracker - Variant Proportions. Available at: <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#variant-proportions>



Source: GISAID