

Giving up on virus control 'dangerous': WHO chief

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The World Health Organization chief warned Monday that abandoning efforts to control the coronavirus pandemic, as suggested by a top US official, was "dangerous", urging countries not to "give up".

"We must not give up," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a virtual briefing.

He acknowledged that after months of battling the new [coronavirus](#), which has claimed more than 1.1 million lives globally, a certain level of "pandemic fatigue" had set in.

"It's tough and the fatigue is real," Tedros said.

"But we cannot give up," he added, urging leaders to "balance the disruption to lives and livelihoods".

"When leaders act quickly, the virus can be suppressed."

His comment came a day after US President Donald Trump's chief of staff Mark Meadows told CNN that the administration's focus had moved to mitigation, not stamping out the virus.

"We're not going to control the pandemic. We are going to control the fact that we get vaccines, therapeutics and other mitigations," Meadows said, comparing the more deadly COVID-19 to the seasonal flu.

'We can do both'

Asked about Meadows' comments, Tedros said he agreed that focusing on mitigation, and especially on protecting the vulnerable, was important.

"But giving up on control is dangerous," he insisted.

Tedros stressed that mitigation and controlling the pandemic were "not contradictory. We can do both."

While governments have a responsibility to ensure things like testing and contact tracing, he emphasised that everyone had a responsibility to halt the spread of COVID-19.

"Governments should do their share and our citizens should do their share, to do everything to minimise transmission," he said.

"There aren't magic solutions to this outbreak," he insisted.

"No one wants more so-called lockdowns. But if we want to avoid them, we all have to play our part."

When asked about Meadows' comments, WHO emergencies chief Michael Ryan also said countries should "not give up on trying to suppress transmission."

"There were many places in the US and elsewhere that had a lot of trouble back in March and April using mitigation," he said.

"When our emergency rooms were overwhelmed and we were rolling freezer trucks up to the back of hospitals, that's the reality of mitigating a disease in the face of a tsunami of cases.

"You run out of capacity to cope. And that is the fear right now."

European 'epicentre'

He voiced particular concern about the situation in Europe, which in the past week accounted for 46 percent of global cases, and nearly a third of global deaths.

"There's no question that the European region is an epicentre for disease right now," Ryan said.

Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO's technical lead on the pandemic, also voiced concern about the situation in Europe—and in particular a surge in hospitalisations and rapidly filling intensive care units.

"In many cities we're seeing beds filling up too quickly, and we're seeing many projections saying the ICU beds will reach capacity in the coming days and weeks," she told Monday's briefing.

But Van Kerkhove voiced optimism, pointing out that "countries across Europe brought transmission under control in the springtime into the summertime, with case numbers at very low levels."

"They can do this again," she said, stressing that the measures needed to halt transmission were well known.

"The other option is if we don't quarantine contacts of known cases, then everyone's going to have to be in quarantine—and that's what we want to avoid."

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