

Immediate release

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No time for complacency warn international public health and healthy ageing experts as WHO announces that COVID-19 is no longer a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)

The International Federation on Ageing (IFA), the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP), the International Longevity Centre UK (ILC), Shot@Life and the World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA) recognize that the immediate crisis element of the global threat of COVID-19 on individuals, health systems and global economies has diminished. Although we are in a much stronger position in facing the COVID-19 pandemic, the virus is here to stay and countries need to manage it alongside other infectious diseases.

Despite the announcement from the WHO that COVID-19 is no longer a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC), disruption to routine health and vaccination services has not fully recovered. The impact of winter vaccine preventable diseases, namely influenza, RSV, pneumococcal pneumonia and COVID-19, remains a serious threat that will have impact on all ages, and especially older people and those with chronic medical conditions.

As the COVID-19 pandemic enters its fourth year, surveillance has declined dramatically. While weekly reported cases and deaths are at the lowest level since the pandemic began, millions continue to be infected or re-infected with SARS-CoV-2 and thousands of people are dying each week.

Complacency is not an option. Vaccination programmes and preparedness measures across the world need to be stepped up. The need to protect our populations' health, especially the most vulnerable, is as strong as ever.

Dr Jane Barratt, Secretary General of the International Federation on Ageing (IFA)

"Today's announcement from the WHO to end COVID-19 emergency declarations serves as an important milestone in the fight against infectious diseases but there is no time for complacency. Historically, rates of adult vaccination are suboptimal and despite the focus on those most at-risk during the pandemic there is strong evidence little has changed in routine immunisations across all ages. Prioritizing vaccination for older adults, including introducing robust targets will help protect individuals, society as well as health systems and economies."

Gonçalo Sousa Pinto, Lead for Practice Development and Transformation, International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP)

"The pandemic demonstrated that the accessibility, convenience, expertise and trustworthiness of pharmacies to offer vaccination services had a huge impact in terms of vaccination coverage and to bringing the pandemic under control – with

48% of all COVID-19 vaccine doses in the USA administered by pharmacies; at least 52% in France; 23% in the UK or over 14% in Australia, for example. Yet, adult vaccination rates remain suboptimal for several respiratory and other diseases, such as flu or pneumococcal pneumonia. It is vital for health system resilience and improved vaccination coverage to leverage the network of pharmacies to diversify and simplify vaccination pathways."

David Sinclair, Chief Exec, International Longevity Centre UK (ILC):

"While these announcements might signal that progress is being made in the fight against COVID-19, it is important to remember that the pandemic is not over. Millions of people have lost their lives or experienced serious illness as a result of the virus. The WHO's announcement serves as a reminder that we must remain vigilant in our efforts to control the spread of the virus.

We must learn the lessons of COVID-19. Access to prevention, including vaccines and other preventive measures, must be available to all people, regardless of where they live or their socioeconomic status. We must work together to ensure that everyone has the tools they need to protect themselves and their communities from future outbreaks."

Martha Rebour, Executive Director, UN Foundation's Shot@Life Campaign

"On top of the enormous suffering the Covid-19 pandemic has wrought it has had another effect on global health: according to a new report from UNICEF, 67 million children missed out on at least one essential vaccine during the pandemic. If we do not reverse this trend, we'll be risking the lives of millions of children and potentially allowing a new public health crisis to develop before our eyes. We must use the lessons learned from this pandemic, namely the recognition of vaccination as a powerful preventive tool, to continue to protect people of all ages from deadly infectious disease."

Michael Moore, World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA)

"There is increasing evidence supporting the importance of a life-course approach to health. However, we must take forward the lessons from the pandemic and focus more attention is needed towards health promotion and disease prevention strategies in ageing populations."

We know that the greater the investment in public health, the better the outcomes both in terms of individual health and well-being and the broader benefits of a healthier, happier and more economically active population. Planning and delivering effective communication about health lifestyles and choices is a critical part of any investment."

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