



ICN says ending COVID-19 restrictions in Europe is premature

Geneva, 28 January 2022 - ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton has cautioned against ending COVID-19 restrictions prematurely.

Speaking in an interview on the Euronews international news channel about ICN's new report on [COVID-19 and the global nursing workforce](#), Mr Catton said a false sense of security had emerged in some countries, which is leading to the premature ending of pandemic restrictions.

"I would urge real caution on easing restrictions. The increased transmissibility of Omicron is a real issue for nurses and health workers. Our report has shown how fragile they are, and we should be doing everything we can to support them. How difficult is it to wear a face mask, to distance socially?"

Mr Catton's remarks echoed those of World Health Organization Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus at the WHO Executive Board meeting.

Dr Tedros said: "Since Omicron was first identified just nine weeks ago, more than 80 million cases have been reported to WHO - more than were reported in the whole of 2020. We will be living with COVID for the foreseeable future, but learning to live with COVID cannot mean that we give this virus a free ride. It cannot mean that we accept almost 50 thousand deaths a week, from a preventable and treatable disease. It cannot mean that we accept an unacceptable burden on our health systems, when every day, exhausted health workers go once again to the front line. It cannot mean that we gamble on a virus whose evolution we cannot control, nor predict."

Dr Tedros said there is a long way to go to achieving WHO's target that 70% of the world's population should be fully vaccinated by the middle of this year, and that 34 states, mainly in Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean regions, have not been able to vaccinate even 10% of their populations.

Speaking later Mr Catton added his concerns about slow progress in vaccinations worldwide.

"The WHO's 40% vaccination target for last year was missed, and I am really worried that if we miss this year's 70% target the pandemic is going to drag on into 2023 and even beyond, with a continuing risk of the emergence of further dangerous variants. ICN has consistently raised this issue, but progress still remains woefully slow: 85% of the people in Africa are still waiting to receive their first dose, and millions of health workers are still not fully vaccinated.

'I urge people to carry on wearing masks when asked to, because having boosters in some countries won't end this pandemic. The only way to the exit door is to vaccinate the whole world, and that's what we should be aiming to achieve."

ICN's workforce report describes the impact the pandemic has had on nurses and provides a blueprint for a ten-year plan to ensure there are enough nurses to provide for the health needs of the whole global population.

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