UNOG Bi-weekly press briefing: COVID-19 Immunity - WHO

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Shotlist

2. Medium wide shot, podium speaker Alessandra Vellucci, Director, United Nations Information Service, UN Geneva shown, seated, in front of organization’s logo and empty tables and chairs during hybrid virtual press conference, Press Room III.
3. SOUNDBYTE (English) — Dr Margaret Harris, World Health Organization (WHO): “The important thing here is that this is clear documentation. So we’ve had anecdotal reports every now and then from people who’ve tested negative, then tested positive. And it hasn’t been clear up until this case whether that was simply a problem of testing or whether people were getting infected a second time.”

5. SOUNDBYTE (English) — Dr Margaret Harris, World Health Organization (WHO): “The important – other important - thing to note is the numbers are very, very small. So this is one documented case in over 23 million and we will probably see other documented cases. But it seems to be not a regular event, we would have seen many more cases.”

7. SOUNDBYTE (English) — Dr Margaret Harris, World Health Organization (WHO): “But it’s very important to understand what this means in terms of immunity, and this is why we have got a lot of research groups actually tracking people, measuring antibodies, trying to understand
how long the immune protection lasts – the natural immune protection - and that should be understood as it is not the same as the immune protection that a vaccine provides.”

8. Wide shot, journalists, masked, sitting apart during hybrid virtual press conference, UN Geneva Press Room III.
9. Close-up, journalist, masked, taking photograph, UN Geneva Press Room III.
10. Medium close-up, journalist, masked, typing on laptop and checking sound recorder, UN Geneva Press Room III.
11. Medium close-up, journalist, crouching and masked, taking photo of TV camera, UN Geneva Press Room III.
COVID-19 reinfection seems not to be a ‘regular event’, says UN health agency

There is likely only a slim possibility of people being reinfected with COVID-19, the UN health agency said on Tuesday, following reports in Hong Kong that a man had contracted new coronavirus for a second time after an interval of more than four months.

Speaking to journalists in Geneva, World Health Organization (WHO) spokesperson Dr Margaret Harris downplayed concerns that the development could herald a new alert.

“The important – other important - thing to note is the numbers are very, very small,” she said. “So this is one documented case in over 23 million and we will probably see other documented cases. But it seems to be not a regular event, we would have seen many more cases.”

Nonetheless, Dr Harris noted that the reinfection signalled on Monday was significant.

According to the University of Hong Kong scientists who announced the development, the virus strains that infected the man more than four months apart were different.

“The important thing here is that this is clear documentation,” the WHO spokesperson said. “So, we’ve had anecdotal reports every now and then from people who’ve tested negative, then tested positive. And it hasn’t been clear up until this case whether that was simply a problem of testing or whether people were getting infected a second time.”

Priorities for the UN health agency include understanding “what this means in terms of (people’s) immunity”, Dr Harris continued.

“This is why we have got a lot of research groups actually tracking people, measuring antibodies, trying to understand how long the immune protection lasts – the natural immune protection - and that should be understood as it is not the same as the immune protection that a vaccine provides.”

To date, the WHO has recorded nearly 23.5 million cases of COVID-19 infection globally, with more than 809,000 deaths. The Americas have been worst-hit by region, with more than 12.5 million people infected, followed by Europe (3.995 million), South-East Asia (3.666 million), Eastern Mediterranean (1.840 million), Africa (1.007 million) and Western Pacific (460,991).

In a related development, WHO said that more than 170 countries are cooperating on a global initiative to produce fairly priced COVID-19 vaccines once they are licensed and approved.

The COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility (COVAX) initiative involves countries and vaccine manufacturers; it is led by WHO, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

In a statement, WHO said that COVAX has the world’s “largest and most diverse COVID-19 vaccine portfolio” with nine candidate vaccines, nine more “under evaluation and conversations underway with other major producers”.

WHO described the project as only global initiative that is working with governments and manufacturers to ensure COVID-19 vaccines are available worldwide to both higher-income and lower-income countries.

But it insisted that in order to secure enough doses of vaccines to protect the most vulnerable populations - such as health workers and the elderly – funding was needed by 31 August deadline.