

EDITORIAL

Four Years into the Era of COVID-19: The Virus Persists and Global Vaccination Efforts Remain Quiescent"

Luiz Carlos de Abreu^{a,b,c}



^aProfessor Titular-Livre. Departamento de Educação Integrada em Saúde. Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Brazil;

^bAdjunct Professor. University of Limerick, Ireland;

^cBrazil and Ireland COVID-19 Observatory.

Corresponding author

luiz.abreu@ufes.br; luizcarlos.deabreu@ul.ieer

Orcid authors:

Luiz Carlos de Abreu

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7618-2109>

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Abstract

The World Health Organization is the global coordinating agency for the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2023, the WHO announced the end of the COVID-19 emergency phase. The end of the Public Health Emergency of International Concern does not mean that COVID-19 has ceased to be a health threat. The worldwide spread of the disease continues to be characterized as a pandemic. The significance of this decision is aimed at public health systems everywhere for countries to transition from emergency mode to management of COVID-19 along with other infectious diseases. The COVID-19 pandemic is not over. The population got tired of the virus, however, the virus did not get tired of the human population. Non-pharmacological preventive measures, vaccination and health education continue to be the arsenal we must control this disease today.

Keywords: COVID-19, Lethality, mortality, virus.

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In March 2023, the World Health Organization declared the conclusion of the COVID-19 emergency phase, marking a significant milestone in the global response to the pandemic¹.

The conclusion of the Public Health Emergency of International Concern does not signify the disappearance of the health threat posed by COVID-19. The global prevalence of the disease still maintains its status as a pandemic. The importance of this decision lies in encouraging countries' public health systems to shift from an emergency response mode to a more sustainable approach, managing COVID-19 alongside other infectious diseases¹.

Hospitalizations and ICU Admissions Globally, during the 28 days from September 18 to October 15, 2023, 95,989 new hospitalizations and 1,603 new intensive care unit (ICU) admissions were reported².

Among the regions reporting data on new hospitalizations, the African Region had the highest representation, with 19 countries (38%). Following closely was the Region of the Americas with 17 countries (30%), the European Region with 17 countries (28%), the Region of Southeast Asia with two countries (20%), and the Western Pacific region with five countries (14%). Notably, there was a lack of data disclosure to the WHO from countries in the Eastern Mediterranean region during this period¹.

Significantly, among the 29 countries consistently providing data on new hospitalizations, 16 countries (55%) experienced a notable increase of 20% or more in hospitalizations over the reported 28 days compared to the preceding period of 28 days. These findings underscore the importance of maintaining high vaccination rates against COVID-19, particularly given the prevalent occurrence of disabilities. Disabilities are physical or mental conditions that challenge individuals to carry out specific activities or engage with the world around them. In 2022, it's estimated that approximately 1 billion people worldwide, and over 60 million adults in the United States, are living with a disability³.

COVID-19 vaccines offer robust protection against severe illness and mortality. While breakthrough infections can occur in vaccinated individuals, they are more likely to experience mild symptoms or remain asymptomatic. Although anyone can contract COVID-19 and potentially develop severe complications or succumb to the virus, the majority of individuals recover without the need for extensive medical intervention a trend consistently observed and substantiated by global researchers.

Since their introduction, vaccines against COVID-19 have proven to be effective in almost entirely reducing deaths caused by COVID-19 around the world. Mass vaccination protects against serious illness, hospitalization, and death. Notably, the immunization provided by the vaccine against COVID-19 protects the population against severe disease and death. However, in case of contact with the SARS-CoV-2 virus and its lodging

in the individual's body, it is still possible to transmit SARS-CoV-2 to other people even if you are vaccinated. Thus, vaccination protects the individual who is vaccinated and not the person who has not been vaccinated.

At the extremes of the human life cycle, from conception to old age, the immune system operates at its lowest biological activity. Consequently, in rare instances, children may experience the development of a severe inflammatory syndrome a few weeks after being infected. Simultaneously, individuals who have contracted COVID-19, regardless of the need for hospitalization, may continue to exhibit symptoms, marking the onset of long-term effects or post-COVID-19 conditions. Common manifestations of long-term COVID-19 include persistent symptoms like fatigue, shortness of breath, and cognitive dysfunction, which can manifest as confusion, forgetfulness, or difficulties with focus and mental clarity. The repercussions of long COVID-19 extend beyond mere symptoms, impacting an individual's ability to carry out everyday activities, including work and household chores⁴.

The aftermath of COVID-19 will persist within our communities, necessitating ongoing efforts and interventions to deliver comprehensive care to the population and restore overall well-being.

It has been four years since the global introduction of COVID-19, and while significant strides have been made in comprehending and addressing the virus, the path to complete eradication continues to present challenges. Nations must transcend political and economic disparities to pursue the common good. Prioritizing investments in research, scaling up vaccine production, and ensuring fair and widespread distribution are pivotal measures to end this protracted chapter in our history⁴.

Hence, there is a shared global consensus that the foundation of science lies in the widespread dissemination of scientific knowledge. In this regard, the Journal of Human Growth and Development (JHGD) has consistently fulfilled this role over its existence. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the journal has served as a conduit for scientific information, offering insights into the impact of the disease on both local and national levels and globally. Presently, it plays a vital role in disseminating a dedicated collection on COVID-19, facilitating the continuous monitoring and analysis of epidemiological outcomes such as incidence, lethality, and mortality. The JHGD remains committed to its mission of scientific dissemination, recognizing it as the primary means to counter misinformation and bridge gaps in scientific knowledge⁵⁻²¹. Health education is vital in imparting knowledge about transmission and fostering an ongoing exploration of new strategies for global health in the battle against COVID-19. In science, the understanding of truth is dynamic and ever evolving. This continuous pursuit of knowledge stands as humanity's most significant scientific legacy.

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Resumo

A Organização Mundial da Saúde é a agência coordenadora global para a resposta à pandemia da COVID-19. No mês de março de 2023 a OMS anunciou o fim da fase de emergência da COVID-19. O fim da Emergência de Saúde Pública de Importância Internacional não significa que a COVID-19 tenha deixado de ser uma ameaça à saúde. A propagação mundial da doença continua caracterizada como uma pandemia. O significado dessa decisão é direcionado aos sistemas de saúde pública em todos os locais para os países realizarem a transição do modo de emergência para o de manejo da COVID-19 juntamente com outras doenças infecciosas. A pandemia da COVID-19 não acabou. A população cansou do vírus, entretanto, o vírus não cansou da população humana. As medidas preventivas não farmacológicas, a vacinação e a educação em saúde continua sendo o arsenal que temos para controlar essa doença nos dias atuais.

Palavras-chave: COVID-19, letalidade, mortalidade, vírus.

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