

Overall strategy

On 5 May 2023, the WHO Director-General declared that COVID-19 no longer constitutes a Public Health of international Concern (PHEIC) and that it is no longer a global health emergency. Despite the termination of the (PHEIC), COVID-19 remains a global health threat.

This means that it is time for those Member States who have not already done so, to shift from emergency mode to the sustained management of COVID-19 taking a risk-based approach using the following recommended tools: COVID-19 vaccination, calibrated public health and social measures, strengthened health system capacity, early detection and targeted response and international border measures.

As of 31 July 2023, the Western Pacific Region has moved from a biweekly COVID-19 situation report to a monthly situation report. All future COVID-19 situation reports will be published the first week of the month until otherwise noted.

Regional overview

As of 28 August 2023, 207 084 830 cases with 416 687 deaths (proportion of fatal cases (PFC) 0.2%) have been reported. The overall case trend increased in early August and declined over the final two weeks (Figures 1 and 2). This trend, however, should be interpreted with caution due to decreased testing and changes in reporting frequency in many countries.

In the previous 28 days, a total of 1 289 392 new cases with 834 new deaths (Table 1) were reported in 22 countries and areas: Australia 15 218, Brunei Darussalam 416, Cambodia 3, China 4 842, Cook Islands 1, French Polynesia 4, Guam 59, Kiribati 3, Republic of Korea 1 234 790, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) 66, Malaysia 1 987, Federated States of Micronesia 58, Mongolia 21, New Zealand 14 487, Niue 9, Northern Mariana Islands 71, Palau 21, Philippines 965, Samoa 3, Singapore 15 481, Tonga 2, and Viet Nam 885.

As of 31 August 2023, XBB.1.16 and EG.5 are the two dominant variants, accounting for 43.8% of sequences in region (22% and 21.8% respectively).

Monthly country situation updates, as of 31 August 2023

- Japan has observed an increasing trend in cases and hospitalizations since mid-May 2023. Between 14 to 20 August, an average of 18 cases were reported per sentinel site. This increased from 14 cases per sentinel site four weeks previously. Regarding hospitalizations, 13 135 new hospitalized cases and 132 ICU admissions were reported between 14 to 20 August. compared to 9 395 hospitalizations and 197 ICU admissions reported between 17 and 23 July. Japan submitted 6 995 sequenced cases between 31 July to 25 August. XBB.1.16 accounted for the highest proportion of sequenced cases (26.2%), followed by XBB.1.9.1 (14.7%) and EG.5 (14.1%).
- After several weeks of increasing case trends, the Republic of Korea has reported a decline in number of weekly cases over the past three weeks. Despite declining case trends, hospitalizations have slightly increased over the past two weeks but remain low; the daily average of hospitalizations between 13-20 August was 227, which rose to 238 between 21-27 August. Additionally, on 23 August, the country downgraded COVID-19's classification as an infectious

disease from Class 4 to Class 2. The Republic of Korea will continue to implement a multi-layered surveillance approach including testing individuals and wastewater but will transition from mandatory COVID-19 surveillance to sentinel.

SARS-CoV-2 Variants of Interest and Variants Under Monitoring in the Region

A total of 14 323 sequences from 9 countries and areas were uploaded to GISAID from 31 July to 25 August 2023.

As of 17 August 2023, BA.2.86 is a Variant Under Monitoring due to its large number of mutations. Nine countries globally have reported at least one sequenced case. No country within the Western Pacific Region has reported this variant as of 31 August.

Between 31 July to 25 August 2023, the distribution of Variants of Interest (VOI) and Variants Under Monitoring (VUM) among the 9 countries and areas was: 22% for XBB.1.16, 21.8% for EG.5, 12.2% for XBB.1.9.1, 8.9% for XBB, 7.5% for XBB.1.5, 6.8% for XBB.2.3, 5.9% for BA.5, 4.8% for XBB.1.9.2, 3.6% for BA.1, 2.4% for CH.1.1, 1.8% for BA.2.75 and 1.5% for BA.2.

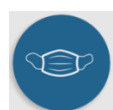
EG.5 nearly doubled in the number of sequenced cases in the Region in the past month, accounting for 11.2% of sequenced cases between 28 June to 26 July 2023 and 21.8% in the following four weeks.

Deployments

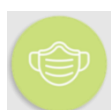
COVID-19
response

564	534	18	1	16
total deployments	deployments completed	actively supporting country offices	actively supporting the Regional Office	currently supporting remotely

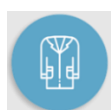
Supplies and logistics for health care workers shipped to 42 destinations in the Western Pacific Region (as of 27 March 2023)



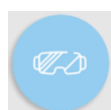
37 764 374
surgical masks



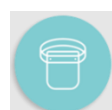
6 492 719
particulate
respirators



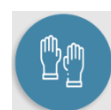
2 069 199
medical gowns



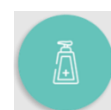
369 336
goggles



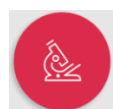
1 408 324
face shields



9 104 960
pairs of gloves



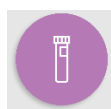
38 189
alcohol-based
hand rub (100mL)



782 344
laboratory tests



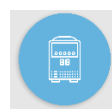
1 998 669
point of care tests



3 730 390
swab kits



706
ICU ventilators



3 198
oxygen
concentrators

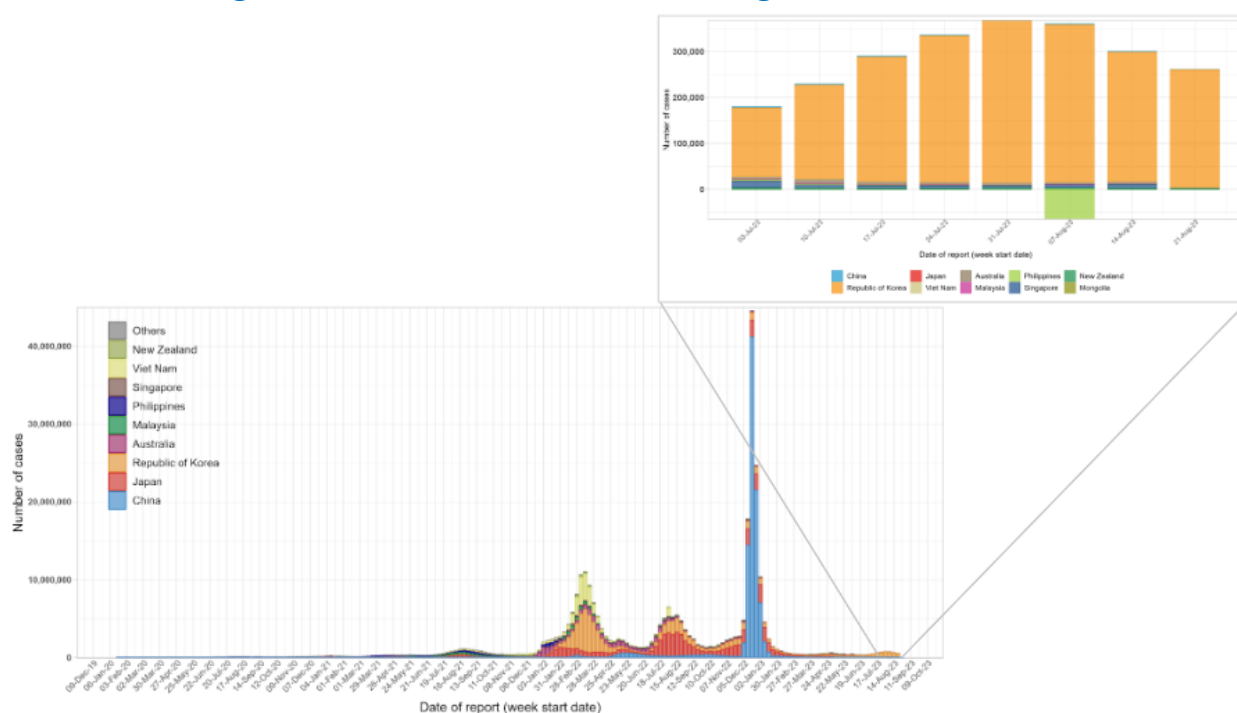


30 155
pulse oximeters



333 490
rapid antigen tests

Figure 1. Epidemic curve of confirmed COVID-19 cases in countries and areas with the highest number of cases, as of 28 August 2023 10:00 (GMT+8)



*Philippines removed duplicated cases on 14 August 2023.

Figure 2. Epidemic curve of confirmed COVID-19 cases in countries or areas with the lowest number of cases, as of 28 August 2023 10:00 (GMT+8)

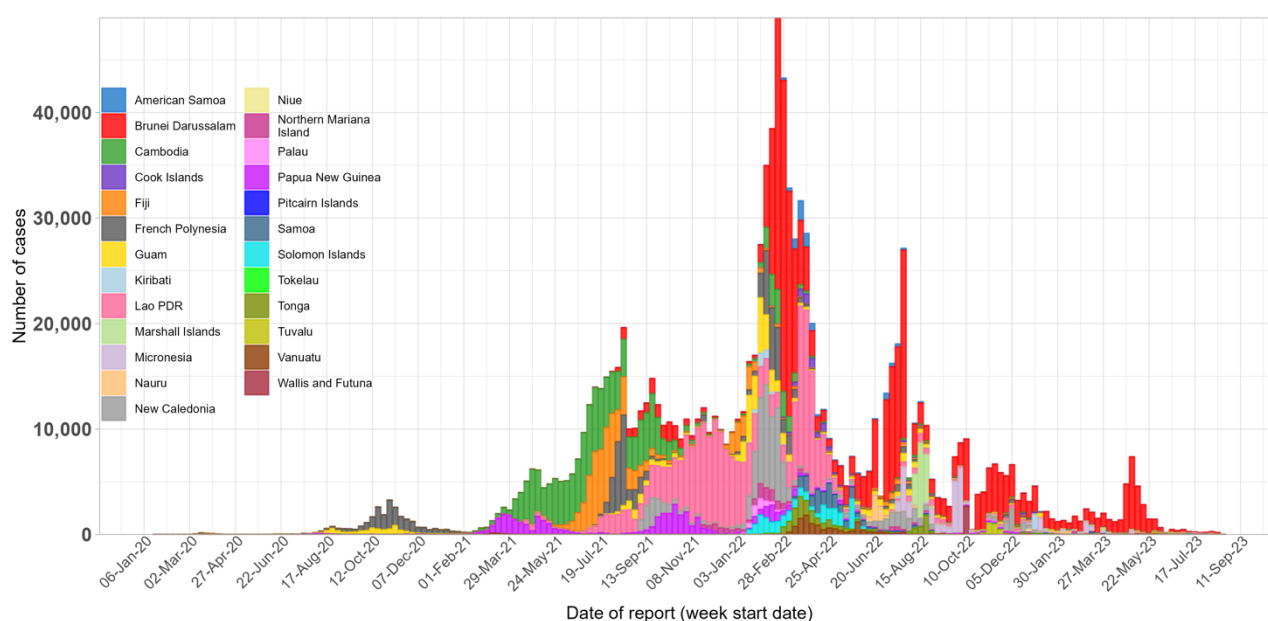


Table 1. Countries or areas with reported laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths, covering the period from 31 July to 28 August 2023, as of 28 August 2023 (GMT+8)

Country or area	New cases (cumulative)	New deaths (cumulative)	Change (28-day average of cases)
American Samoa	0 (8 332)	0 (34)	0
Australia	19 754 ¹ (11 560 270)	151 ¹ (22 482)	-2 297.82
Brunei Darussalam	458 ¹ (310 019)	1 ¹ (163)	-27.14
Cambodia	17 (138 937)	0 (3 056)	-3.43
China	8 141 ¹ (99 300 040)	73 ¹ (121 563)	-374.75
Cook Islands	7 ¹ (7 151)	0 ¹ (2)	-0.32
Fiji	0 ¹ (69 047)	0 ¹ (885)	-4.5
French Polynesia	4 ¹ (78 617)	0 ¹ (649)	-0.46
Guam	111 (51 786)	2 (415)	-2.54
Japan	0 ¹ (33 803 572)	0 ¹ (74 694)	0
Kiribati	1 (5 082)	0 (24)	-1.54
Korea, Republic of	945 642 (33 201 796)	242 (35 313)	16863
Lao PDR	248 (218 739)	0 (671)	0.79
Malaysia	2 424 ¹ (5 121 920)	9 (37 181)	-439.29
Marshall Islands	0 ¹ (16 098)	0 ¹ (17)	0
Micronesia (Federated States of)	12 ¹ (26 472)	0 ¹ (65)	0.36
Mongolia	19 ¹ (1 010 954)	0 ¹ (2 284)	-31.5
Nauru	0 ¹ (5 393)	0 ¹ (1)	0
New Caledonia	0 ¹ (80 064)	0 ¹ (314)	0
New Zealand	14 543 (2 360 435)	81 (3 219)	-871.64
Niue	2 ¹ (822)	0 ¹ (0)	-0.04
Northern Mariana Islands	52 ¹ (14 096)	0 ¹ (41)	-1.57
Palau	109 ¹ (6 122)	0 ¹ (9)	3.82
Papua New Guinea	0 ¹ (46 864)	0 ¹ (670)	0
Philippines	7 421 (4 172 920)	108 (66 592)	-345.61
Pitcairn Islands	0 ¹ (4)	0 ¹ (0)	0
Samoa	0 ¹ (16 775)	0 ¹ (31)	-1.14
Singapore	23 768 ¹ (2 534 940)	0 ¹ (1 872)	-163.04
Solomon Islands	0 ¹ (21 611)	0 ¹ (153)	0
Tokelau	57 ¹ (80)	0 ¹ (0)	1.39
Tonga	0 (16 819)	0 (12)	-0.07
Tuvalu	0 ¹ (2 943)	0 ¹ (1)	-1.14
Vanuatu	0 (12 019)	0 (14)	0
Viet Nam	1 189 (11 621 812)	0 (43 206)	-156.54
Wallis and Futuna	0 ¹ (3 550)	0 ¹ (8)	0
Total	1 023 979 (205 846 101)	667 (415 641)	12 145.29

Note: Data continues to be collected and may change according to Member States' reports.

¹ Countries reported no or partial data for the 28-day period ²Japan no longer reports case numbers as of 8 May 2023.

Table 2. Countries or areas in the Western Pacific Region that have reported currently circulating Variants of Concern, as of 31 August 2023 10:00 (GMT+8)

Country or area	Omicron sublineage									
	BA.5*	BA.2.75*	XBB^	XBB.1.5	XBB.1.16	XBB.1.9.1	XBB.1.9.2	EG.5	CH.1.1	BQ.1*
American Samoa	X			X	X					
Australia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Brunei Darussalam	X	X	X		X					X
Cambodia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
China	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Guam	X								X	X
Japan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Kiribati	X									
Lao PDR	X									
Malaysia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Marshall Islands		X								X
Micronesia (Federated States of)	X	X		X						X
Mongolia	X		X	X	X	X	X			X
New Zealand	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Northern Mariana Islands	X	X		X						X
Palau	X									X
Papua New Guinea	X	X	X							X
The Philippines	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Republic of Korea	X	X	X							X
Samoa	X									
Singapore	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Solomon Islands	X									
Tonga	X									
Vanuatu	X									
Viet Nam	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	

*Includes sub-variants. ^Includes sub-variants not specified on the table. Note: GISAID submission data is subject to change.

Key information and announcements

Information and Planning

The Regional Office continues to monitor COVID-19 incidence in countries and areas across the Region. Updated information is available on the [dashboard for the Western Pacific Region](#).

Strategic Communication

The Regional Office actively supports country offices in testing messages to ensure data-driven and audience-focused risk communication and has completed the administration process for continuing to engage a vendor to provide technical support for message testing on COVID-19 and other emergency topics.

Messages for the Public

- On WPRO social media, published posts on country partnerships for COVID-19 response, COVID-19 vaccination and risk-based measures, mental health during COVID-19, GOARN updates including on emergency preparedness and response, COVID-19 and primary health care as part of the Seventh Asia-Pacific Parliamentarians Forum on Global Health.
- Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) posts:
 - Community engagement training by the [Cambodia](#) Ministry of Health, with support from WHO and partners including the European Union, has equipped village chiefs across all 25 provinces in the country with the knowledge and skills to help control transmission of #COVID19, influenza, and other respiratory diseases, and collaborate with authorities more closely on health issues facing their communities. [Facebook](#) / [X \(Twitter\)](#)
 - Live your life while protecting yourself and those around you from the #coronavirus: Know your risk. Take appropriate protective measures. Get all the recommended doses of the #COVID19 vaccine including booster doses. [Facebook](#) / [X \(Twitter\)](#)
 - COVID-19 is no longer a global health emergency, but it is still making people sick. #VaccinesWork to help protect you against serious illness, hospitalization and death from the coronavirus.. #YouthDay [Facebook](#) / [X \(Twitter\)](#)
 - #COVID19 is still circulating in every country. Dr Maria Van Kerkhove updates on the latest variant of interest EG.5. [Facebook](#) / [X \(Twitter\)](#)
 - Crossing rivers, a field team travelled over two days from Honiara, capital of Solomon Islands 🇸🇻, to reach the mountain village of Kuvamiti. Their mission was to provide and deliver routine healthcare and immunization to those who live and work there. #NoMatterWhat the hardship, WHO and partners continue to support the delivery of #COVID19 vaccines and healthcare services. [Facebook](#) / [X \(Twitter\)](#) (retweet)
 - Many of us remember the COVID-19 pandemic as a time of isolation. In partnership with WHO, SEACO Asia at Monash University studied how to improve relationships and increase [human connection](#) among people in the Segamat district in [#Malaysia](#) 🇲🇾 through digital health interventions. [Facebook](#) / [X \(Twitter\)](#)
 - Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic emphasize the importance of #PrimaryHealthCare for health security. The pandemic acted as a catalyst, accelerating many innovations and adjustments in health services that must be sustained while designing a new approach to #PHC. [X \(Twitter\)](#)