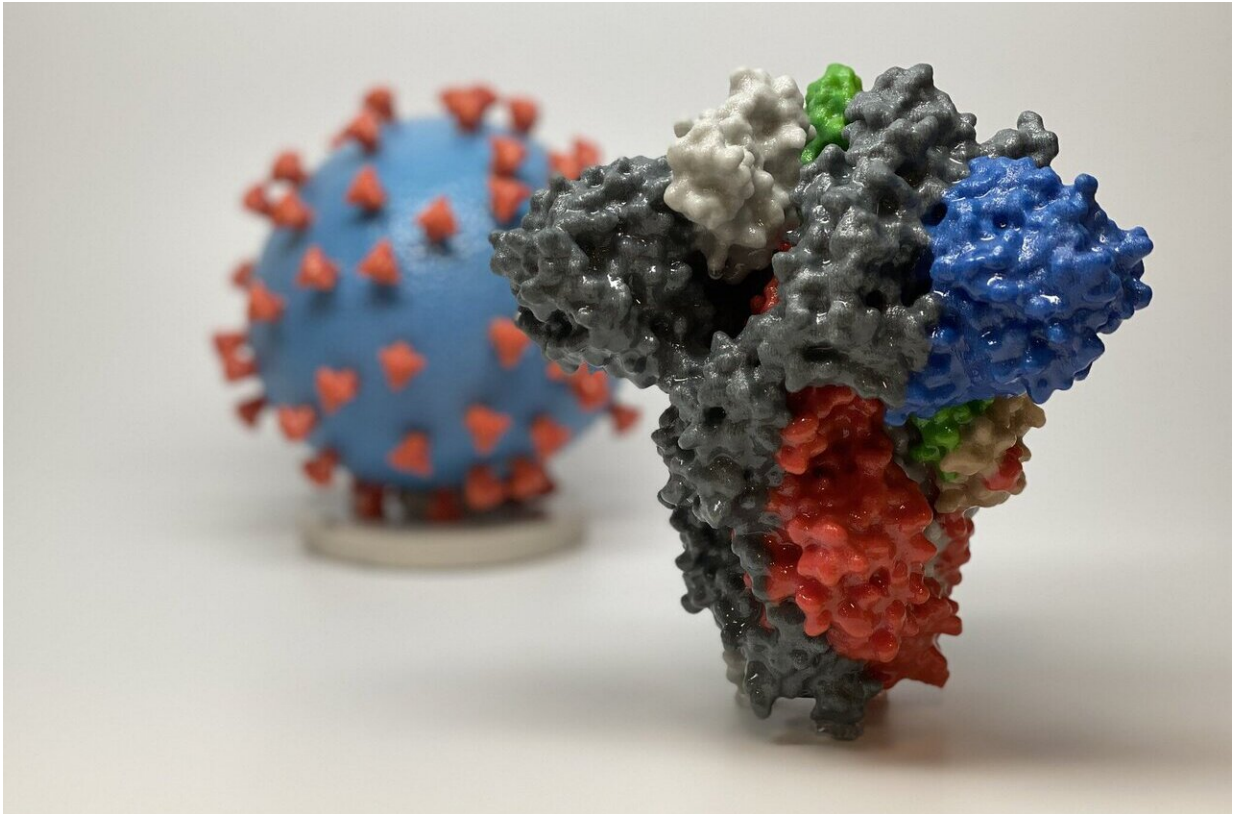


World won't vanquish virus this year: WHO

March 1 2021



3D print of a spike protein of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19—in front of a 3D print of a SARS-CoV-2 virus particle. The spike protein (foreground) enables the virus to enter and infect human cells. On the virus model, the virus surface (blue) is covered with spike proteins (red) that enable the virus to enter and infect human cells. Credit: NIH

It is unrealistic to think the world will be done with the COVID-19

pandemic by the end of the year, the World Health Organization warned Monday.

WHO emergencies director Michael Ryan said it might however be possible to take the tragedy out of the [coronavirus](#) crisis by reducing hospitalisations and deaths.

But the virus remains in control, he added, especially given that global new case numbers increased last week after six consecutive weeks of decline.

"It will be very premature, and I think unrealistic, to think that we're going to finish with this virus by the end of the year," Ryan told journalists.

"But I think what we can finish with, if we're smart, is the hospitalisations, the deaths and the tragedy associated with this pandemic."

Ryan said that vaccinating front-line health care workers and those most vulnerable to severe disease would "take the fear... out of the pandemic".

But he added that recent progress could not be taken for granted and "right now the virus is very much in control".

Mistake warning

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said new case numbers rose last week in Europe, the Americas, southeast Asia and the eastern Mediterranean.

"This is disappointing, but not surprising," he said.

"Some of it appears to be due to relaxing of public health measures, continued circulation of variants, and people letting down their guard.

"Vaccines will help to save lives, but if countries rely solely on vaccines, they're making a mistake. Basic public health measures remain the foundation of the response."

Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO's COVID-19 technical lead, added: "If the last week tells us anything, it's that this virus will rebound if we let it—and we cannot let it."

Tedros wants COVID-19 vaccination under way in every country within the first 100 days of 2021—meaning there are 40 days left to go.

He welcomed Monday's first injections of doses delivered through the global Covax vaccine-sharing facility, which were administered in Ghana and the Ivory Coast.

Covax doses coming

"It's encouraging to see [health workers](#) in lower-income countries starting to be vaccinated, but it's regrettable that this comes almost three months after some of the wealthiest countries started their vaccination campaigns," he said.

"And it's regrettable that some countries continue to prioritise vaccinating younger, healthier adults at lower risk of disease in their own populations ahead of health workers and older people elsewhere," he said, without naming them.

A further 11 million vaccine doses will be delivered to countries this week through the Covax programme, with 237 million doses to be allocated to 142 participating economies between now and the end of

May.

The final allocation breakdown for the first wave of Covax doses is to be released on Wednesday.

As for the notion of COVID-19 vaccine passports proving travellers have been immunised, Ryan said that in the absence of universal access to the jabs, "there are serious human rights and [ethical issues](#) regarding the application of restrictions on travel on that basis".

However, as doses become more widespread, "clearly there will need to be considerations around how public health measures... can be adapted", he added.

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