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Countries, health partners discuss efforts to curb COVID-19 in WHO South-East Asia Region

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For five consecutive weeks, the Region reported a rapid surge of COVID-19, registering over two million new cases



The World Health Organization convened a meeting of member countries and health partners to discuss the strengthening of collective efforts to control COVID-19 spread.

“Several countries continue to experience high transmission. We are still very much in the acute phase of a pandemic. We must continue to aggressively respond, using all tools at our disposal,” said Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia, opening the ‘South-East Asia Partners’ Meeting on COVID-19’.

“There remains a clear and ongoing need in all countries of the Region to strengthen health system capacity, including access to critical supplies such as oxygen,” she said.

To fill those gaps, WHO in recent weeks provided over 340 metric tonne of essential medical supplies worth over $50 million and continues to mobilise more, she said and emphasised the need for equitable distribution and availability of equipment and supplies.

WHO is committed to increasing supply chain resilience, including through local manufacturing to secure equitable access to therapeutics, diagnostics, personal protective equipment (PPE) and other supplies.

On COVID-19 vaccine equity, the Regional Director said this demands extraordinary action and global collaboration. While the development of COVID-19 vaccines has been exceedingly fast, the supply cannot currently meet demand. This has resulted in a slowing down of vaccination in several countries, including those reliant on COVAX vaccines.

WHO will continue to support all countries to implement evidence-based public health and social measures; enhance social and economic protections; and maintain equitable access to essential health services – a core priority from the beginning of

the response, which requires sustained and scaled-up support.

Lauding the partners, Dr Khetrapal Singh said their support has enabled WHO implement a comprehensive, coordinated and sustained response.

With assistance from partners, WHO in the Region has been able to deliver over 2.2 million sample collection kits, 1.9 million manual PCR tests, 2.1 million gloves, 7 million medical masks, more than 500 000 gowns, and more than 600 000 respirators since the start of the pandemic.

This is in addition to their support to the South-East Asia Regional Health Emergency Fund which is being used to fund emergency preparedness as well as response measures in the Region.