

Editorial

When will the COVID-19 pandemic be over?

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In late 2019 after the first report of COVID-19 cases from China, the disease spread rapidly worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a pandemic on March 11, 2020. Globally, over 541 million cases and 6.32 million deaths, and in Ethiopia, over 485 000 confirmed infections and 7500 deaths were reported. The global and national figures are underestimates, and World Health Organization recently indicated that the actual number might be four times higher. Underreporting and access to testing are the principal reasons. It is enigmatic that Africa is the least affected compared to other continents when we analyze the number of deaths. The devil remains in the details.

The damage that the COVID-19 caused to our world is beyond our comprehension. The economic, social, and political implications will stay for years. The health adversaries in individuals recovering from the disease with and without symptoms extend from long COVID-19 (estimated one out of five) to new-onset diabetes mellitus, hypertension, and worsening of preexisting comorbidities. Despite the success of vaccine discovery, and around 55% of individuals vaccinated approaching herd immunity globally, we now see another wave emerging worldwide. The messages portrayed by the global and national media are controversial. We note complacency in non-pharmaceutical prevention strategies, despite the roaring pandemic. Face mask use and hand hygiene are left optional, and the restrictions are almost removed. In Ethiopia, the figures show the number of vaccinated is lower than the global average, and we face colossal vaccine hesitancy that includes health professionals.

The current wave of COVID-19 cases worldwide is due to waning humoral immunity and the rapid emergence of variants. Fortunately, the number of patients requiring hospitalization and subsequently dying is recognizably low. In recent months, multiple lineages of the omicron variant (B.1.1. 529) have emerged. Five subvariants occurred less than a year after the omicron variant was reported (BA 1, BA 2, BA 2.12.1, BA 4, and 5). It is very unusual for a single variant to mutate so often to cause these many subvariants with enhanced infectiousness. As a result, we question ourselves when the pandemic is over? The answer is not yet. At present, the ones most affected are unvaccinated and the unboosted. Still, the vaccines help alleviate the disease severity and boosters, too. Then we ask, how many booster doses are required? No one knows the answer, but for now, we say the third dose with a heterologous vaccine is vital. COVID-19 will stay with us. Thus we should adapt ourselves to live with it.