**(CNN)**The[coronavirus](https://cnn.com/world/live-news/coronavirus-pandemic-05-14-20-intl/index.html) spreading across the globe might never be eliminated, a leading World Health Organization official has said.

At a Wednesday briefing, Mike Ryan of the WHO said: "I don't think anyone can predict when or if this disease will disappear."

During a media briefing in Geneva, Dr. Mike Ryan, executive director of the WHO's health emergencies program, warned Wednesday that the [disease](https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/13/us/coronavirus-human-challenge-study-invs/index.html) may join the mix of viruses that kill people around the world every year,

"This virus just may become another endemic virus in our communities and this virus may never go away. HIV hasn't gone away," Ryan said. "I'm not comparing the two diseases but I think it is important that we're realistic. I don't think anyone can predict when or if this disease will disappear."

More than 4.3 million cases of the virus have been recorded worldwide, according to Johns Hopkins University's [latest tally.](https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html)

Multiple teams of [scientists](https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/23/health/coronavirus-vaccine-trial-uk-gbr-intl/index.html) around the world are currently trying to develop a viable coronavirus vaccine.

[What happens if a coronavirus vaccine is never developed? It has happened before](https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/03/health/coronavirus-vaccine-never-developed-intl/index.html)

"We may have a shot at eliminating this virus but that vaccine will have to be available, it will have to be highly effective, it will have to be made available to everyone and we'll have to use it," Ryan said. "This disease may settle into a long-term problem or it may not."

WHO infectious disease epidemiologist Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove struck a more optimistic tone during Wednesday's briefing.

"The trajectory of this outbreak is in our hands," Van Kerkhove said. "The global community has come together to work in solidarity. We have seen countries bring this virus under control. We have seen countries use public health measures."

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus echoed that sentiment, adding: "We should all contribute to stop this pandemic."

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