

Mexico swine flu death toll rises to 42

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(AP) -- Mexican health officials say that testing of backlogged cases has increased the confirmed swine flu death toll from 31 to 42. That includes three new deaths in the past two days.

Officials also have confirmed 1,070 other cases of infection.

Health Secretary Jose Cordova says most of the new confirmations came from older cases.

The news came Wednesday as Mexico ended a five-day, government-ordered shutdown designed to contain the virus.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. Check back soon for further information. AP's earlier story is below.

MEXICO CITY (AP) - Dozens of Mexican nationals who were quarantined at hospitals and hotels in China despite showing no symptoms of swine flu arrived home early Wednesday on a government-chartered jet.

First lady Margarita Zavala and officials from the Foreign Relations Department greeted the passengers as they deplaned the Aeromexico flight at Mexico City's international airport. Authorities did not say exactly how many were on the plane but estimated the number at about 140.

"I'm very happy to be back in Mexico," passenger Oscar Fernandez told

reporters. "We were in quarantine for four days in Guangzhou but they treated us very well."

Fellow passenger Daniel Charnitsky concurred with Fernandez that they had not been mistreated, and added that all the passengers "are happy to be back."

Mexico has criticized the quarantine as unfair and discriminatory. Of the 71 Mexicans held at hospitals and hotels in China, Mexican diplomats say none had swine [flu symptoms](#).

China has defended its measures to block the swine [flu virus](#) from entering the world's most- populous nation.

But Lin Ji, deputy director of the general office of the Jilin provincial health department in China, said the government had decided to lift a quarantine for a group of Canadian students two days early, following pressure from Canada's government.

He added, however, that the government would continue its strident checks on travelers from swine flu-hit regions.

"China's large cities have a very high demographic density," the Chinese Embassy in Mexico said in a statement reported late Tuesday night on the Web site of the Mexican newspaper El Universal. "In addition, the public health system in China is far from being perfect. If the virus shows up among our population, the consequences could be catastrophic."

The Mexican travelers returned to a capital that has begun emerging from a government-ordered lockdown designed to contain the spread of the virus that has caused 31 deaths in Mexico and the U.S. and sickened nearly 1,900 in 21 countries.

On Tuesday, a day before stores, restaurants and factories were officially being allowed to reopen, Mexico City started to show its usual ebullience. Thousands of newspaper vendors, salesmen hawking trinkets and even panhandlers dropped their protective masks and joined the familiar din of traffic horns and blaring music. Some shops opened early.

"We have a lot of confidence nothing is going to happen," said Irineo Moreno Gonzales, 54, a security guard who limited takeout customers to four at a time at a usually crowded downtown Starbucks on Tuesday. "Mexicans have the same spirit we've always had. We're ready to move forward."

There were still signs, however, of the virus that has set off world health alarms. A Texas woman who lived near a popular border crossing was confirmed as the first U.S. resident and the second person outside Mexico to die after contracting swine flu. Mexico's Health Department announced three more confirmed deaths, raising the country's total to 29.

The Texas woman, the second confirmed person to die with swine flu in the U.S., lived not far from the Mexico border and had chronic medical conditions, as did the Mexico City toddler who died of swine flu last week during a visit to Houston, Texas, health officials said.

The 33-year-old woman was pregnant and delivered a healthy baby while hospitalized, said Leonel Lopez, Cameron County epidemiologist. She was a teacher in the Mercedes Independent School District, which announced it would close its schools until Monday.

Mexico's government imposed the five-day shutdown to curb the flu's spread, especially in this metropolis of 20 million where the outbreak sickened the most people. Capital residents overwhelmingly complied - other towns less - and officials cautiously hailed the drastic experiment

as a success.

Still, many more pedestrians were out Tuesday, the shutdown's final day. Many wore protective masks, but many didn't, as they dodged the familiar green-and-white VW taxis cruising for fares and noisy trucks bearing bottled water.

Some officials cautioned against a rush back toward normalcy.

"The scientists are saying that we really need to evaluate more," said Dr. Ethel Palacios, deputy director of the swine flu monitoring effort in [Mexico City](#). "In terms of how the virus is going to behave, we are keeping every possibility in mind. ... We can't make a prediction of what's going to happen."

But Palacios said it is a delicate process trying to balance the public's health and its economic welfare. "One of most the important things is that you need to know that these measures do have an impact not only on health but also on other aspects of life and society," she said.

The World Health Organization said it was shipping 2.4 million treatments of anti-flu drugs to 72 countries "most in need," and France sent 100,000 doses worth \$1.7 million to Mexico.

Mexican Finance Secretary Agustin Carstens unveiled plans Tuesday to stimulate key industries and fight foreign bans on Mexican pork products. He said persuading tourists to come back is a top priority.

Carstens said the outbreak cost Mexico's economy at least \$2.2 billion, and he announced a \$1.3 billion stimulus package, mostly for tourism and small businesses, the sectors hardest hit by the epidemic. Mexico will temporarily reduce taxes for airlines and cruise ships and cut health insurance payments for small businesses.

In China, the group of 25 Canadian students and their professor who had been under observation at a hotel in the northeastern city of Changchun since the weekend will be released Wednesday instead of Friday because they were healthy, Ji said.

Meanwhile, 34 passengers who were on a flight from Shanghai to Hong Kong with a Mexican swine flu patient on April 30 will be released from quarantine Thursday, Hong Kong's Secretary for Food and Health York Chow told reporters. He said they will be offered two nights' extra hotel accommodation paid by the Hong Kong government. The nationalities of the passengers wasn't immediately clear.

Doctors are still running tests on the Mexican patient to see how infectious he is and he won't be released immediately, Chow said. He said the patient is in stable condition.

In other parts of the world Wednesday, Swedish authorities confirmed the Scandinavian country's first case of [swine flu](#). The Swedish Institute for Infectious Disease Control said that a woman who recently visited the United States tested positive for the virus. It said the woman, who is in her 50s, has now recovered from the flu.

Besides the more than 70 Mexican nationals flying home from China, about 20 Chinese businessmen and students, each wearing surgical masks, left the Mexican border city of Tijuana on Tuesday on a Chinese government flight after being stranded when China canceled all direct flights to Mexico.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said he will ask governments to reverse trade and travel restrictions lacking a clear scientific basis.

Dr. David Nabarro, senior U.N. coordinator for influenza, said countries must explain to WHO their rationale for such measures, and that their

effectiveness is likely minimal at best.

"We want to be very clear that the World Health Organization is not recommending travel restrictions related to the outbreak of this novel influenza," Nabarro said.

Associated Press writers Mark Stevenson, James Anderson and Katherine Corcoran contributed to this report.

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