

Brazil sees record virus deaths as pandemic surges in Latin America

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Brazil is emerging as a new virus hotspot in Latin America

Brazil has seen a record number of coronavirus deaths as the pandemic that has swept across the world begins to hit Latin America with its full force.

With Europe continuing to ease lockdowns and looking to restart its summer tourism season, Latin America has seen coronavirus infections surge in recent days and now accounts for about 580,000 of the world's nearly five million confirmed cases.

Brazil has been hardest-hit in the region, rising to the third-highest number of cases in the world, as Peru, Mexico and Chile also see steady increases in infections.

Health officials in Brazil reported 1,179 new coronavirus deaths on Tuesday, the first time the daily toll exceeded 1,000, but far-right President Jair Bolsonaro remains bitterly opposed to lockdowns, having described them as unnecessary over a "little flu".

With the outbreak in the world's sixth-largest country expected to accelerate until early June, many Brazilians are deeply worried about the next few weeks.

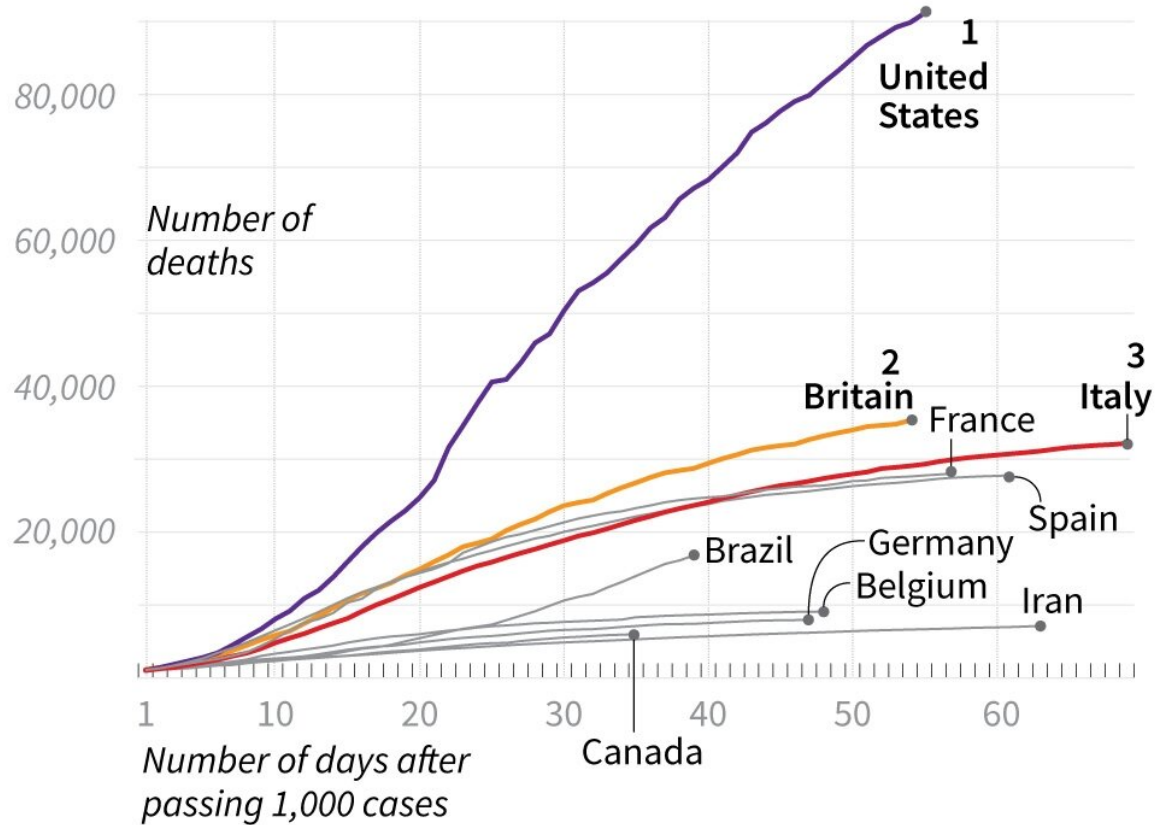
"Our country is going from bad to worse," said retiree Gilberto Ferreira in Rio de Janeiro.

"We have an inefficient government, and the people also do not obey the rules of the pandemic."

Bolsonaro has refused to accept experts' advice on responding to the pandemic, pressing regional governors to end stay-at-home measures.

Rise of COVID-19 deaths

Selected countries, as of May 19



Source: AFP database

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Rise of COVID-19 deaths

And like US counterpart Donald Trump, he has promoted the use of anti-malaria drugs against the virus despite studies showing they have no benefit and could have dangerous side effects.

New federal guidelines released by Brazil's health ministry on Wednesday recommended doctors prescribe the drugs, chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine, from the onset of coronavirus symptoms.

Chile is also suffering from a sharp rise in cases and deployed soldiers on the outskirts of its locked-down capital Santiago after clashes with protesters angry about food shortages and job losses.

There were worrying signs in Argentina too, with authorities in the second city Cordoba having to backtrack on easing lockdown measures following a sharp spike in infections.

Europe hopes to save tourism

Europe is meanwhile hoping the worst is behind it, with the number of new cases and deaths on a steady decline after the continent suffered nearly 170,000 fatalities from the pandemic.



Protests have gripped parts of the Chilean capital, where demonstrators are complaining of a lack of food and work because of the virus

The global toll now stands at more than 323,000, according to an AFP tally.

Lockdown measures are being eased in many parts of Europe, with residents enjoying old freedoms for the first time in weeks.

"I haven't seen the sea for two months," said Helena Prades at a beach in Barcelona, where residents were allowed to stroll from Wednesday.

"We just really wanted to hear the sound of the waves and walk for a bit along the sand."

Face masks are now mandatory for anyone aged six and over in public where social distancing is not possible, as the country emerges from one of the world's toughest lockdowns.

European officials are scrambling to try to save the summer tourism season, which is crucial for the continent's economies.

European Union tourism ministers held a virtual meeting on Wednesday as Greece announced plans to restart its travel season.



The UN warned that the pandemic "threatens African progress"

Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said seasonal hotels could reopen from June 15 and that international flights would resume from July 1.

With Greece suffering fewer than 170 COVID-19 deaths, Mitsotakis said its prompt response to the virus would be a "passport of safety, credibility and health" to attract visitors.

"We will win the economy war just as we won the health battle," he said.

And in Italy, all airports were given the green light to reopen from June 3, including for international flights, the transport ministry said.

Top French chef Guy Savoy, who is doing home deliveries of his famed artichoke soup with truffles after his Paris restaurant closed its doors, said he was anxious for tourists to return.

"Paris needs the whole planet to work. If there are no tourists, half of the restaurants will disappear," Savoy said.

Pressure is also building in the United States—the world's worst-hit country with nearly 92,000 deaths and more than 1.5 million cases—for an end to confinement measures that have hammered the economy and left tens of millions unemployed.



Russia reported a record high in daily deaths, but said the number of live infections was finally falling

Trump blames China 'incompetence'

Trump is especially keen to reopen businesses ahead of an election due in November, and his Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin warned the American economy risks suffering "permanent damage" the longer the lockdown continues.

Trump said in a tweet Wednesday that the United States was "Transitioning back to Greatness" and that he could restore plans for a G7 summit at his Camp David retreat previously scheduled for June.

Trump, who has blamed China for failing to contain the outbreak, lashed out at again at Beijing in another tweet.

"It was the 'incompetence of China', and nothing else, that did this mass Worldwide killing," he tweeted.

He has also accused the World Health Organization of mismanaging the pandemic, threatening to permanently cut US funding to the agency.



Life is creeping back to normal in parts of Europe, including in hard-hit Italy



Thailand reported a drop in road accidents thanks to virus restrictions

The WHO agreed this week to launch an independent investigation into its handling of the outbreak.

Countries in Asia have also been gradually reopening, with hundreds of thousands of South Korean students lining up for temperature checks and given hand sanitiser as they returned to school after two months off.

And India said domestic air travel will resume on May 25 after a two-month shutdown, even as the country reported its biggest daily jump in coronavirus infections, with 5,611 new cases in 24 hours.

Nearly 107,000 cases have been reported in India and more than 3,300 people have died, with experts predicting that infections will peak in June-July.

Despite the crisis in some of the country's biggest cities, the Indian government has insisted it is keeping the spread under control in the world's second-most populous nation.

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