



flood of coronavirus patients, authorities said Tuesday, and doctors are having to make wrenching choices over which patients should get available beds.

Health officials said 95% of the country's 2,400 ICU beds are occupied even after a doubling of capacity from the levels in March. They announced plans to add 400 more critical care beds in the coming days.

"This is an extraordinarily difficult time," Health Minister Jaime Mañalich said.

A nation of 18 million people, Chile has the third most coronavirus cases in the region, after Brazil and Peru, with an average of 4,000 new infections reported daily. About 15% of the cases require hospitalization.

That is forcing Chilean physicians to face a dilemma that previously confronted doctors in hard-hit nations like Italy and Spain: Which patient with coronavirus should be given the last available bed?

Khaty Barriga, mayor of the populous commune of Maipú, said there was only one respirator free for use Tuesday at the El Carmen de Maipú hospital.

His area is part of the Santiago [metropolitan region](#), which has had more than 80% of the nearly 78,000 [coronavirus](#) cases and just over 800 deaths recorded in Chile.

Dr. Claudia Vega, head of the hospital's ICU, had said Monday in a television interview that "right now I am choosing which bed is going to be vacated and choose the right person, which is the right one."



A medical worker wearing protective gear as a precaution against the spread of the new coronavirus, rests his head against an ambulance at the saturated emergency area of the San Jose hospital in Santiago, Chile, Tuesday, May 26, 2020. (AP Photo/Esteban Felix)





Funeral workers dress in protective gear as a precaution against the spread of the new coronavirus, before picking up the remains of person who died from the new coronavirus, at the San Jose hospital in Santiago, Chile, Tuesday, May 26, 2020. (AP Photo/Esteban Felix)



Funeral workers dress in protective gear as a precaution against the spread of the new coronavirus, before picking up the remains of person who died from the new coronavirus, at the San Jose hospital in Santiago, Chile, Tuesday, May 26, 2020. (AP Photo/Esteban Felix)





A Chilean police officers measures the temperature of a homeless man as a precaution against the spread of the new coronavirus, before he is given a bag of free food, outside the San Jose hospital in Santiago, Chile, Tuesday, May 26, 2020. (AP Photo/Esteban Felix)



A medical worker walks past protective clothing hung out to dry at the San Jose hospital in Santiago, Chile, Tuesday, May 26, 2020. (AP Photo/Esteban Felix)



A Chilean police officers measures the temperature of a homeless man as a precaution against the spread of the new coronavirus, before he is given a bag of free food, outside the San Jose hospital in Santiago, Chile, Tuesday, May 26, 2020. (AP Photo/Esteban Felix)





Demonstrators hold a banner with a message that reads in Spanish: "We are hungry," next to a burning barricade during a protest demanding food aid from the government amid the new coronavirus pandemic, at the 17 de Mayo neighborhood in Santiago, Chile, Tuesday, May 26, 2020. Protesters are complaining about the lack of resources to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. (AP Photo/Esteban Felix)



Protesters carry a damaged television spray painted with a message that reads in Spanish: "Turn it off for being a liar," directed at local news channels, past a burning barricade during a protest demanding food aid from the government amid the new coronavirus pandemic, at the 17 de Mayo neighborhood, in Santiago, Chile, Tuesday, May 26, 2020. Protesters are complaining about the lack of resources to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. (AP Photo/Esteban Felix)





Demonstrators chant for help near a burning barricade during a protest demanding food aid from the government amid the new coronavirus pandemic, at the 17 de Mayo neighborhood in Santiago, Chile, Tuesday, May 26, 2020. Protesters are complaining about the lack of resources to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. (AP Photo/Esteban Felix)





Medical workers wearing protective gear as a precaution against the spread of the new coronavirus, take from an ambulance a patient in respiratory distress while other patients wait their turn to be admitted to the saturated emergency area of the San Jose hospital in Santiago, Chile, Tuesday, May 26, 2020. (AP Photo/Esteban Felix)



Medical workers wearing protective gear as a precaution against the spread of the new coronavirus, take from an ambulance a patient in respiratory at the saturated emergency area of the San Jose hospital in Santiago, Chile, Tuesday, May 26, 2020. (AP Photo/Esteban Felix)



Medical workers wearing protective gear as a precaution against the spread of the new coronavirus, take from an ambulance a patient in respiratory distress while other patients wait their turn to be admitted to the saturated emergency area of the San Jose hospital in Santiago, Chile, Tuesday, May 26, 2020. (AP Photo/Esteban Felix)

"May God enlighten me in this," she said.

The Chilean Society of Intensive Medicine, which consults with hundreds of hospitals and clinics daily, said the occupancy of critical care beds in the greater Santiago area stood at 97%. A report from the University of Chile said the increase in new cases "suggests a possible complete saturation of the system this week."



The Santiago region is home to 8 million people, who have been under mandatory orders for isolation at home for 11 days. Except for a 10 p.m.-5 a.m. curfew, residents are allowed to obtain permission online to venture outside to perform necessary tasks, such as grocery shopping and taking pets for brief walks.

© 2020 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: Chile's hospital ICUs near full capacity as pandemic rages (2020, May 27) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-05-chile-hospital-icus-full-capacity.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--