

Coronavirus infections top 5 million worldwide

May 21 2020



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Global infections from the novel coronavirus passed five million on Thursday as cases surged in Latin America, signs of normal life returned to parts of Europe and the US and China kept up their blame game over

the pandemic.

The grim milestone comes after known cases of COVID-19 doubled in just one month, according to AFP data collected from official sources, with the death toll now topping 328,000 worldwide.

While many hard-hit European countries have significantly curbed the contagion, Latin America is becoming a new hotspot with cases on the rise.

Brazil logged the third-highest number of cases in the world after the US and Russia.

Peru, Mexico and Chile have also seen steady increases in infections, with nurses in Lima warning that the health system is on the brink of collapse after cases and deaths tripled over the past three weeks.

"It's like a horror film," Miguel Armas, a nurse at the Hipolito Unanue hospital in the capital Lima, told AFP.

"Inside it seems like a cemetery given all the bodies. Patients are dying in their chairs (or) in their wheelchairs."

In Brazil, far-right President Jair Bolsonaro continues to scorn experts' advice on curbing the contagion as he presses regional governors to end stay-at-home measures.

And like US President 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.

China's 'victory'

Trump, for his part, insists the US is "Transitioning back to Greatness" as states reopen at different speeds.

His optimism was in sharp contrast to the bleak health situation in the country, which leads the world in cases and deaths.

While daily death tolls are no longer on a steady incline, the losses are still punishing with more than 1,500 additional fatalities reported in 24 hours on Wednesday, bringing the total number in the US to more than 93,400.

On the economic front, the latest figures out of the US showed the rate of unemployment slowing—but the total number of jobs lost since mid-March stood at an eye-watering 38.6 million.

Trump, who is desperate to boost his political fortunes ahead of November elections, has also doubled down on his finger-pointing at China, who he blamed for "this mass Worldwide killing".

Beijing hit back, warning it would retaliate if the US goes forward with a sanctions threat.

Republican US Senators proposed legislation last week that would empower Trump to slap sanctions on China if Beijing does not give a "full accounting" for the outbreak that emerged in Wuhan late last year.

"It is neither responsible nor moral to cover up one's own problems by blaming others," said China's parliament spokesman Zhang Yesui.

We "will make a firm response and take countermeasures based on the deliberation of these bills", he said.

Despite criticism of its initial handling of the virus, Beijing is

determined to project a narrative of strength and success in reining in its own outbreak and coming to the aid of countries who have been hit far harder.

Domestic cases are now down to a trickle, according to its official figures.

In the latest symbol of normalisation, the country held an opening ceremony Thursday for its biggest political event of the year—the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)—after months of delay over health concerns.

Analysts say the gathering's sessions will officially start Friday and be a chance for the party to reaffirm its "victory" over the virus.

Second surge

As governments pray for an end to the economic strangulation of shutdowns, the race to develop a vaccine has been buoyed by experiments on monkeys that offered hope that humans can develop immunity to the virus.

The US also pumped an additional \$1 billion into the British pharmaceuticals group AstraZeneca to help fund the production of a vaccine.

In the meantime, governments are testing ways to live with the dangers despite fears of a second wave of infections.

Already a common sight in Spain, masks were officially made mandatory Thursday for anyone over the age of six in public places where social distancing is not possible.

"The more tools we use, the better," said Miguel Domingo, a 49-year-old architect talking his two dogs for a walk in Madrid, which is emerging from one of the toughest lockdowns.

But the director of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, Andrea Ammon, warned it was not a question of if there will be a second surge of infections but "when and how big".

"I don't want to draw a doomsday picture but I think we have to be realistic. That it's not the time now to completely relax," she told Britain's Guardian newspaper.

The warning will be a tough pill to swallow for governments whose easing measures appear to have slowed the economic fallout from the pandemic, which has now "likely bottomed out" in the eurozone according to a survey by IHS Markit.

In Denmark, the exit from lockdown picked up pace as museums and zoos began reopening Thursday and health officials said the spread of the virus was slowing.

Cyprus also bounded into its second stage of de-confinement, lifting curfews and allowing outdoor restaurants, barber shops and beaches to open on the Mediterranean island, though airports and hotels remain closed.

In reopened cafes, customers were seated outdoors with spacing between tables, while some ate with plastic face shields still on.

Yet some experiments in adjusting to the new normal have gone awry.

Not everyone was amused in Singapore by a yellow robot dog deployed to patrol a city park and monitor social distancing.

The remote-controlled hound uses cameras to estimate the number of visitors and blasts out a message to remind joggers and walkers to stand at least one metre apart.

"I think it's really going to be chilling in a way—something is looking around and I'm not sure how it's going to react to me when I go near it," local resident Simon Neo told AFP.

© 2020 AFP

Citation: Coronavirus infections top 5 million worldwide (2020, May 21) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-05-coronavirus-infections-million-worldwide.html>

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.