

# A drug offers hope amid spikes in coronavirus infections

June 16 2020, by R.j. Rico, Menelaos Hadjicostis and Lisa Marie Pane

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Residents line up to get tested at a coronavirus testing center set up outside a sports facility in Beijing, Tuesday, June 16, 2020. China reported several dozen more coronavirus infections Tuesday as it increased testing and lockdown measures in parts of the capital to control what appeared to be its largest outbreak in more than two months. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

As nations grapple with new outbreaks and spiking death tolls from the coronavirus, a commonly available drug appeared Tuesday to offer hope that the most seriously ill could have a better chance of survival.

The pandemic has forced countries to impose lockdowns and tough restrictions on daily life and travel, but infections have surged as they eased these rules and reopened their economies. With no vaccine available and much still unknown about the virus, researchers in England announced the first drug shown to save lives.

The drug, called dexamethasone, reduced deaths by 35% in patients who needed treatment with breathing machines and by 20% in those only needing supplemental oxygen, researchers in England said. It did not appear to help less ill patients.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the drug was the "biggest breakthrough yet" in treating the coronavirus, and top U.S. infectious disease expert Dr. Anthony Fauci called it "a significant improvement in the available therapeutic options that we have."

Britain is making dexamethasone available to patients on the country's National Health Service. The U.K. Department of Health said the drug had been approved to treat all hospitalized COVID-19 patients requiring oxygen, effective immediately. It said the U.K. had stockpiled enough to treat 200,000 patients.



Passengers wearing personal protective face masks leave the United Airline ticket counter after checking in Tuesday, June 16, 2020, at the Tampa International Airport in Tampa, Fla. Some major US airlines, including United, American Airlines, Delta Air Lines, JetBlue, and Southwest Airlines, pledged to roll out new policies requiring masks for passengers to help stop the spread of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Chris O'Meara)

"It's on almost every pharmacy shelf in every hospital, it's available throughout the world, and it's very cheap," said Peter Horby of Oxford University, one of the leaders of the trial that randomly assigned 2,104 patients to get the drug and compared them with 4,321 patients getting only usual care.

Since the virus emerged in China late last year and spread worldwide,



there have been more than 8 million confirmed cases and over 441,000 deaths.

The U.S. death toll has exceeded 116,900, according to Johns Hopkins University. That surpasses the number of Americans who died in World War I, when 116,516 were killed—although both tolls are far from precise.

The U.S. has the most confirmed infections and deaths from COVID-19 in the world, and as parts of the economy have reopened in recent weeks, cases have surged in places like Texas, Arizona and Florida, where the virus has sidelined some members of a U.S. team that tracks hurricanes.



Residents wearing masks to curb the spread of the coronavirus ride past a neighborhood under lockdown in Beijing Tuesday, June 16, 2020. Chinese authorities locked down a third neighborhood in Beijing on Tuesday as they rushed to prevent the spread of a new coronavirus outbreak that has infected more than 100 people in a country that appeared to have largely contained the virus. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

For most people, the virus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

Countries that appeared to have largely contained the virus are seeing new outbreaks.

In China, authorities have taken drastic action to contain an outbreak in Beijing that has infected more than 135 people. Most of the cases have been linked to the capital's Xinfadi wholesale food market, with several neighborhoods near it and another market locked down and thousands ordered to be tested. The city also has suspended sports games, closed entertainment venues and cut back domestic flights, among other measures.

New Zealand, which hadn't seen a new case in three weeks, was investigating after two women who flew in from London to see a dying parent were allowed to leave quarantine and drive halfway across the country before they were tested and found to be positive.



People wearing face masks to protect against the spread of coronavirus, walk in the main Kizilay Square, in Ankara, Turkey, Tuesday, June 16, 2020. Turkey has made the wearing of face masks mandatory in five more provinces, following an uptick in COVID-19 cases. Health Minister Fahrettin Koca tweeted early Tuesday that the wearing of masks is now compulsory in 42 of Turkey's 81 provinces.(AP Photo/Burhan Ozbilici)

The reemergence of the virus in the country once praised for how it handled infections raised the specter that international air travel could trigger a fresh wave of contagion just as countries are reopening airports to stimulate tourism.

Canada and the U.S. will extend to July 21 an agreement to keep their border closed to nonessential travel, with many Canadians fearing cases arriving from the U.S.



"This is a decision that will protect people on both sides of the border as we continue to fight COVID-19," Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said.

The U.S. car industry was among the first to reopen, yet the virus began to spread again almost immediately—even with significant safety precautions in factories. Similar spikes have been seen after hair salons, day care centers and restaurants reopened.



A health worker in protective suit offers water to a person waiting for nasal swab test for COVID-19 at Sir Ganga Ram hospital in New Delhi, India, Tuesday, June 16, 2020. India is the fourth hardest-hit country by the COVID-19 pandemic in the world after the U.S., Russia and Brazil. (AP Photo/Manish Swarup)

Hula Hut, a large Tex-Mex restaurant in Austin, Texas, reopened in May but had to shut down again this month for six days after two employees tested positive for COVID-19 in quick succession.

Texas doesn't require restaurants to close after a positive test, but general manager Elias Chocalas said it gave time to sanitize Hula Hut repeatedly and get his employees tested.

"We follow all the steps and then to see that someone has gotten it is just disheartening," Chocalas said. "It just brought the realization that this is going to happen regardless of how safe we are."

Texas is among the states reporting spikes in cases, setting a single-day high with 2,622 new infections Tuesday and a record for COVID-19 hospitalizations for the eighth time in nine days, with 2,518.

"It does raise concerns, but there is no reason right now to be alarmed," Gov. Greg Abbott said, urging people to wear masks and stay home as much as possible.





Visitors ride the "Bandit" roller coaster at the newly-opened Yomiuriland amusement park in Tokyo, Tuesday, June 16, 2020. The park has been closed since the end of March as a part of the precautions to help curb the spread of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)

The Republican said Texas' health care system can handle the surge as the nation's second-most-populated state pushes forward with reopening one of the world's largest economies.

Florida's confirmed cases also set a daily record, at almost 2,800. With hurricane season underway, the virus has spread to the team that operates the nation's hurricane hunter planes. Five employees at the team's Lakeland, Florida, base tested positive last week, forcing others into quarantine, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration officials

said.

New cases in Arizona hit an alarming daily high of nearly 2,400—almost double the previous record, health officials said. The state also reported 25 additional deaths, while hospital intensive care units were hovering around 80% capacity.

In Tennessee, the number of infected patients in hospitals has reached its highest level, at more than 400, Vanderbilt University researchers said. A surge in new cases and hospitalizations has led Memphis and Nashville to delay plans to reopen more businesses and increase capacities for restaurants and retail stores.



A family enters the newly-reopened Yomiuriland amusement park in Tokyo, Tuesday, June 16, 2020. The park has been closed since the end of March as a



part of the precautions to help curb the spread of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)



Women walk on the beach at Muizenberg, Cape Town, South Africa, Tuesday June 16, 2020. The country now has more than a quarter of the coronavirus cases on the 54-nation African continent with more than 73,000 cases after new, record-high infections were registered in South Africa over the weekend. (AP Photo/Nardus Engelbrecht)





A couple adjust sunshades at the beach of Palma de Mallorca, Spain, Tuesday, June 16, 2020. Borders opened up across Europe on Monday after three months of coronavirus closures that began chaotically in March. But many restrictions persist, it's unclear how keen Europeans will be to travel this summer and the continent is still closed to Americans, Asians and other international tourists. (AP Photo/Joan Mateu)



A primary school student gestures for a hug from a distance to her teacher, as she collects her personal belongings, as the school year ends, in a school in Barcelona, Spain, Tuesday, June 16, 2020. (AP Photo/Emilio Morenatti)



Employees wear masks as they disinfect to avoid contamination with the COVID-19 virus at the Mohammed V airport in Casablanca, Morocco, Tuesday June 16, 2020. The ONDA (National Office of the Airport) in Casablanca, has taken various measures to implement social distancing against COVID-19 while awaiting a reopening expected on July 10 in Morocco.(AP Photo / Abdeljalil Bounhar)





Members of the N.H. Senate stand for the Pledge of Allegiance as they gather for a session on Tuesday, June 16, 2020 at the State House in Concord, New Hampshire. The 24 N.H. Senators met in the N.H. House Chamber while adhering to social distancing rules due to the COVID-19 virus outbreak. (AP Photo/Charles Krupa)



An employee measures the temperature of another in Yoyo Land, an indoor amusement center in Bangkok, Thailand, Tuesday, June 16, 2020. Daily life in the capital resumes to normal as the government continues to ease restrictions related to running business and activities that were imposed weeks ago to combat the spread of COVID-19. Thailand reported no local transmissions of the coronavirus in the past 3 weeks. (AP Photo/ Gemunu Amarasinghe)



Bayern's Joshua Zirkzee, center, wears a mask against the spread of the new coronavirus arrives for the German Bundesliga soccer match between Werder Bremen and Bayern Munich in Bremen, Germany, Tuesday, June 16, 2020. Because of the coronavirus outbreak all soccer matches of the German Bundesliga take place without spectators. (AP Photo/Martin Meissner, Pool)





Two maskless Turkish people ride scooters in a public garden, in Ankara, Turkey, Tuesday, June 16, 2020. Turkey has made the wearing of face masks mandatory in five more provinces, following an uptick in COVID-19 cases. Health Minister Fahrettin Koca tweeted early Tuesday that the wearing of masks is now compulsory in 42 of Turkey's 81 provinces.(AP Photo/Burhan Ozbilici)

Nevada, where casinos reopened almost two weeks ago, has reported 379 new cases, its largest daily increase since May 22. Health officials said it can be partially attributed to delayed reporting but is also part of an upward trend in the last three weeks.

Elsewhere around the world:

— Record-high infections were registered in South Africa over the weekend, two weeks after businesses and houses of worship reopened. The country now has more than a quarter of the cases on the 54-nation African continent, with over 73,000.

— Egypt's health ministry reported 97 deaths Monday, the country's highest for a single day. Egypt, which has resisted a full lockdown, has over 46,000 COVID-19 infections and 1,672 deaths.

— Israel's steady rise in infections since restrictions eased last month has increased fears of what a top Health Ministry official said looked like the "beginning of a wave," with 200 new cases daily. That's a tenfold increase from a few weeks ago, and authorities warned of possibly reinstating strict lockdown measures.

— El Salvador, the most locked down country in Latin America, slowly began opening Tuesday after nearly three months of mandatory stay-at-home orders. Back were taxis and ride-sharing services, hair salons, and food delivery and takeout, but schools remained closed.

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