

Fresh virus cluster in China raises fears for pandemic control

June 13 2020, by Laurie Chen and Afp Bureaus



China has reported six new domestic coronavirus cases

Lockdowns were imposed in parts of Beijing on Saturday to try and prevent the spread of a new coronavirus cluster, highlighting the challenges that lie ahead even for places where outbreaks are under

control.

It came as Brazil claimed the unenviable position of having the second-highest virus death toll worldwide behind the United States, with no sign the infection rate is slowing in Latin America.

After COVID-19 was first detected in central China last year, the vast Asian country largely eliminated transmission within its borders through hyper-strict lockdowns that were emulated across the globe.

But as the government reported six new domestic cases, most linked to a meat market in southern Beijing, people were forced indoors at several nearby residential estates—marking a painful step backwards in the city's return to normality.

Officials said the district has established a "wartime mechanism" and "field command centre" to deal with the fresh outbreak, as paramilitary police were seen around the market hotspot and a mass testing campaign linked to the cluster was announced.

Worldwide, the pandemic has killed more than 425,000 people and infected more than 7.6 million, while wreaking large-scale economic devastation.



Brazil claimed the unenviable position of having the second-highest virus death toll worldwide

Latin America has emerged as the latest epicentre of the respiratory disease, believed to have jumped from an animal to humans at a Chinese market that sold wildlife.

Brazil's [health ministry](#) recorded 909 deaths in the past 24 hours, putting the total at 41,828—meaning the country of 212 million people has now surpassed Britain's death toll.

"Some areas are at a critical stage" in Brazil, with intensive care unit occupancy levels of more than 90 percent, World Health Organization emergencies director Mike Ryan told journalists in Geneva.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who threatened last week to quit the WHO over "ideological bias", has dismissed the virus as a "little flu", and berated [state officials](#) for imposing lockdowns.

US states see rising cases

World health officials have warned that the virus is far from contained. "The fight is not over," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said this week.



Officials said the southern Beijing district has established a 'wartime mechanism' to deal with the fresh outbreak

In the US, which has confirmed the most COVID-19 deaths—over 114,000—more than a dozen states, including two of the most populous, Texas and Florida, reported their highest-ever daily case totals this week.

"It's important that we remember that this situation is unprecedented. And that the pandemic has not ended," Robert Redfield, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, told a media briefing on Friday.

Nevertheless, US President Donald Trump and many local officials remain determined to get the world's biggest economy back on track.

The virus and resulting lockdowns have caused a spike in US unemployment—44.2 million people have filed claims for jobless benefits since mid-March.

Europe is pushing ahead with its exit from lockdown, with a number of countries preparing to reopen borders on a limited basis on Monday after the EU Commission urged a relaxation of restrictions.

COVID-19

World toll Friday, June 12, 1900 GMT

Countries & territories affected **196**

Deaths	new deaths	Cases	new cases
422,851	5,007	7,569,861	131,826

New since June 11 at 1900 GMT

Most affected countries

	Deaths	new deaths	Cases
UNITED STATES	114,065	856	2,031,173
BRITAIN	41,481	202	292,950
BRAZIL	40,919	1,239	802,828
ITALY	34,223	56	236,305
FRANCE	29,374	28	193,090
SPAIN	27,136	0	243,209
MEXICO	15,944	587	133,974
BELGIUM	9,646	10	59,819
GERMANY	8,763	8	185,674
IRAN	8,659	75	182,545
INDIA	8,498	396	297,535
CANADA	8,094	49	97,894

Increases over 24 hours may not tally exactly with previous day's total due to inavailability or late publication of data or corrections made by authorities

Sources: AFP tally based on official tolls

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France said it would gradually reopen its borders to non-Schengen countries from next month, and Germany said it would end land border checks on Monday.

Greece said it would welcome tourists again, though Britons remain barred—and visitors from Italy, Spain and the Netherlands must undergo tests on arrival.

Court action

In several European countries the focus has shifted to the courts and who might eventually be pinned with the blame for the global financial and health crisis.

In Italy, one of the countries hardest hit by the virus, prosecutors questioned Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte over his government's initial response.

In the country's northern Lombardy region, an investigation has been launched into why a quarantined "red zone" was not enforced around two towns sooner.

And in Bergamo province, 50 victims' family members filed complaints this week over how the crisis was handled.



Europe is pushing ahead with its exit from lockdown



In Italy's Bergamo province, 50 victims' family members filed complaints this week over how the crisis was handled

"All investigations are welcome. The citizens have the right to know and we have the right to reply," Conte said this week.

Elsewhere, British Airways, easyJet and Ryanair launched legal action against the British government over a "flawed" 14-day [coronavirus](#) quarantine system introduced this week.

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