

Mexico prepares to reopen half the country amid pandemic

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A street artist costumed as the new coronavirus laughs during a protest demanding the resumption of economic activities after not being able to earn a living since March because of the restrictions to curb the spread of COVID-19 in Mexico City, Thursday, June 11, 2020. Mexico's industrial activity plunged by nearly 30% in April compared to a year earlier as the economy ground to a halt under measures aimed at slowing the spread of the virus. (AP Photo/Fernando Llano)

Mexico began setting dates for re-opening businesses in half the country next week, even as the nationwide daily confirmed cases total rose Friday by a record 5,222 and 504 new deaths were reported.

Total confirmed cases now number 139,196 and total deaths are at almost 16,450. Both are considered substantial undercounts due to very limited testing.

The federal government announced that starting Monday, half of Mexico's 32 states can start limited re-openings of hotels and restaurants and broader re-openings of markets. For example, factories and hotels could resume operations if they take safety measures.

The plan is based on a four-color scheme in which states with the worst conditions are colored red and those making progress are orange. States would eventually change to yellow and then green as conditions improved.

The states to re-open are those that have falling rates of coronavirus hospitalizations, lower rates of infection and acceptable ratios of available hospital beds.

They include states that are home to resorts like Cancun and Los Cabos, but not Huatulco or Acapulco.

Mexico City is by far the hardest-hit part of the country and it was not included on the federal list of re-opening states. But the city government announced earlier Friday its own re-opening plan that would begin next week. It involves dropping driving restrictions and allowing manufacturing and neighborhood businesses to resume if they meet health standards.



Mexico City's Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum speaks to the press regarding the spread of the new coronavirus, as Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador stand behind during his daily news conference at the presidential palace in Mexico City, early Thursday, March 19, 2020. (AP Photo/Fernando Llano)

Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum said that street markets, malls, restaurants and churches could reopen a week later, but at reduced capacity.

The plan follows Sheinbaum's announcement earlier in the week of greatly expanded coronavirus testing in the capital. The city plans to make a stronger effort to identify infections and trace contacts as Sheinbaum, in conjunction with the surrounding State of Mexico, tries to safely reactivate a metropolitan area of some 20 million people.

Mexico City hopes to process 100,000 tests daily by July, which would be a dramatic increase over current testing levels but still far short of some of the largest cities elsewhere in the world.

The capital was never under a mandatory lockdown, but people were urged to stay at home. In recent weeks, street traffic has increased steadily as the federal government began pushing a return to a "new normal."



Street vendors shout "We want work" during a protest demanding the resumption of economic activities after not being able to earn a living since March because of the restrictions to curb the spread of the new coronavirus in Mexico City, Thursday, June 11, 2020. Mexico's industrial activity plunged by nearly 30% in April compared to a year earlier as the economy ground to a halt under measures aimed at slowing the spread of the novel coronavirus. (AP Photo/Fernando

Llano)

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has been eager to reactivate the economy, which has shed nearly 1 million formal jobs and is forecast to contract 8.8% this year.

"We don't think there are going to be new outbreaks," the president said Friday. "We have to be careful that this doesn't happen, and open little by little with health measures, health protocols, and if we see a new outbreak somewhere, return to confinement—everything voluntarily."

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