

Saudi virus cases top 100,000 with new spike ahead of the hajj

June 7 2020



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The number of coronavirus cases in Saudi Arabia surpassed 100,000 on Sunday, the health ministry said, amid a new surge in infections just weeks ahead of the start of the hajj.

The total number of infections rose to 101,914—the highest in the Gulf—while the [death toll](#) climbed to 712, the ministry added.

The kingdom has seen infections spike as it eases stringent lockdown measures, with the [number](#) of daily cases exceeding 3,000 for the second day in a row on Sunday.

On Friday, the kingdom announced a renewed lockdown in the city of Jeddah, gateway to the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, to counter the jump in cases.

The measures include a curfew running from 3 pm to 6 am, a suspension of prayers in mosques and a stay-at-home order for public and private sector workers in the Red Sea city whose airport serves pilgrims.

After an easing of precautions in the kingdom in late May, the ministry said that strict measures could also soon return to Riyadh, which was "witnessing a continuous increase during the last days" of critical cases of the pandemic.

The kingdom has said it will continue to suspend the year-round "umrah" pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina over fears of the coronavirus pandemic spreading in Islam's holiest cities.

Authorities are yet to announce whether they will proceed with this year's hajj, scheduled for the end of July, but have urged Muslims to temporarily defer preparations for the annual pilgrimage.

Last year, some 2.5 million faithful travelled to Saudi Arabia from across the world to take part in the hajj, which all Muslims must perform at least once in their lives if able.

Citation: Saudi virus cases top 100,000 with new spike ahead of the hajj (2020, June 7) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-06-saudi-virus-cases-spike-hajj.html>

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