

# Virus cases hit seven million as Latin America crisis deepens

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The number of coronavirus infections globally topped seven million on Monday as deaths mounted in Latin America, but New Zealand's declaration of victory against the pandemic offered some hope for the

rest of the world.

Europe also continued to emerge from its lockdown, with Pope Francis proclaiming that the worst was over in Italy although he expressed sympathy for Latin America.

"Your presence in the square is a sign that in Italy the acute phase of the epidemic is over," Francis said on Sunday while addressing Catholics in Saint Peter's Square at the Vatican for the first time since the COVID-19 crisis began.

"Unfortunately in other countries—I am thinking of some of them—the virus continues to claim many victims."

Rising numbers of deaths were recorded from Brazil to Mexico to Peru, driving the confirmed global death toll above 400,000 and the number of declared infections over seven million, according to an AFP tally.

Brazil's crisis is escalating and it has the world's third-highest death toll at more than 36,000, but President Jair Bolsonaro continues to play down the impact of the virus.

In Chile the confirmed death toll reached 2,290 after miscalculations from March and April were corrected, adding 1,541 to the figure, health minister Jaime Manalich said Sunday.

The virus, which emerged in China late last year, has forced more than half of humanity into some form of lockdown over the past six months and driven the [global economy](#) towards its worst downturn since the Great Depression.

China, which has been accused of covering up the crucial early stages of the virus, on Sunday hit back at critics, saying it "will respond in the face

of rumours, defamation, attacks and smearing".

National Health Commission director Ma Xiaowei said reports the government delayed sharing the virus genome sequence "seriously go against the facts".

## **Joyful dance**

Elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region there was progress, with New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern telling reporters she danced around her living room on hearing her country had reached the milestone of zero active infections.

The South Pacific nation lifted all domestic restrictions on Monday after it went 17 days with no new infections.

This allowed New Zealand Rugby to announce a restart to a top-flight domestic competition this week, with fans allowed to pack into the stadiums.

"We're incredibly proud, and grateful, to be the first professional sports competition in the world to be in a position to have our teams play in front of their fans again," NZR chief Mark Robinson said.

Thailand also hit a positive milestone after two weeks with no local infections. The only recorded cases came from overseas arrivals who were quarantined.

The kingdom was the first country outside China to officially report a COVID-19 case in January but it has largely escaped the high tolls seen elsewhere in the region, with just 58 deaths.

Fears that large parts of Asia could still have the worst in front of them

persist, however, with the [death](#) toll and infection rate climbing sharply in India.

Still, after a 10-week lockdown, the government is risking lifting some curbs to ease the devastating impacts on the economy, and malls and temples re-opened in several Indian cities on Monday.

In Europe, countries are slowly working towards a post-pandemic normal and trying to revive tourism sectors in time for the summer peak season.

Britain said it would reopen places of worship for individual prayer on June 15, but also on Monday began imposing a two-week quarantine period for most arrivals into the country—a move that prompted legal action by airlines.

British Airways and the low-cost carriers EasyJet and Ryanair said in a joint statement the measure would devastate tourism and destroy even more jobs.

The European Union has said it could re-open borders to travellers from outside the bloc in early July.

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