

Virus death toll nears half a million as cases surge in US, Latin America

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Coronavirus cases are surging across large parts of the United States and in Latin America, according to experts and figures, highlighting how far the world remains from stopping the pandemic as the global death toll

neared half a million on Wednesday.

Six months into a crisis that has devastated the [global economy](#), the International Monetary Fund was set to issue its latest growth forecasts later Wednesday.

The World Trade Organization already warned on Tuesday that the outlook for the world economy over the next two years remains "highly uncertain", and that global trade is expected to see a huge [coronavirus](#)-driven plunge in the [second quarter](#).

The number of deaths worldwide from the outbreak has surged past 477,000, a doubling of the toll in less than two months, according to an AFP tally on Wednesday.

China, where the virus was first detected in the city of Wuhan in December, said a new outbreak that has infected 256 people in Beijing since early June is "under control", but fears remain over the risk of community transmission.

Experts warned that small, recurrent outbreaks of the virus were likely in future.

"There may be an increase in cases in the winter or next spring, but I don't think the outbreak will be as big as the first wave of the pandemic," Zhong Nanshan, a leading Chinese respiratory expert, said on Wednesday

Europe remains the worst-hit region with over 194,000 dead from more than 2.5 million cases.

The continent has been loosening [travel restrictions](#) following a brutal few months when it was the epicentre of the pandemic.

Russia Wednesday held grand World War II commemorations, presided over by President Vladimir Putin, which were postponed from the traditional date of May 9 due to the outbreak.

The Kremlin said safety precautions were being taken in the lead-up to the parade—but participants were not wearing masks and there is still a ban on mass gatherings in Moscow.

'Real risk'

Just a day after the biggest lifting of the restrictions yet in England, medical experts on Wednesday warned the British government to prepare for the "real risk" of a second wave.

Germany, the first major EU nation to begin easing lockdown measures, on Tuesday reimposed them on more than 600,000 people following a cluster of infections at a slaughterhouse.

And world men's tennis number one Novak Djokovic tested positive after an exhibition tournament in the Balkans, drawing widespread condemnation for organising the event.

Tennis was hoping to follow team sports like football back into arenas and stadiums, but the positive tests of Djokovic and three others have dampened its prospects.

The United States has recorded more deaths than any other nation, with more than 121,000 from over 2.3 million cases.

White House advisor Anthony Fauci warned the next two weeks would be "critical to our ability to address... surgings" in Florida, Texas and other states.

However President Donald Trump, whose handling of the crisis has been widely criticised as erratic, is determined to fast-track efforts to restore normality.

He continued to stoke controversy on Tuesday, doubling down on weekend comments he wanted to slow testing because so many confirmed infections made the United States look bad.

"I don't kid," Trump said, after a White House official described his initial comments as just a joke.

With the parts of the United States unable to contain the pandemic, the European Union was considering blocking US travellers as it reopens its borders to tourism, the New York Times reported.

'Little flu'

Latin America has been one of the world's worst hotspots for weeks, and the number of deaths there and in the Caribbean surpassed 100,000, according to an AFP tally.

Brazil, where President Jair Bolsonaro has flouted containment measures and described the virus as a "little flu", is officially the worst-hit country after the United States.

More than 52,000 people are confirmed to have died of the virus in Brazil, as a [federal judge](#) ordered Bolsonaro to wear a face mask in public.

"The president has a constitutional obligation to follow the laws in force in the country, as well as to promote the general welfare of the people," the judge wrote.

Meanwhile, an Iranian official called for mask-wearing to be made compulsory as the country on Wednesday reported its highest daily coronavirus death toll in more than two-and-a-half months.

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