

Breathtaking virus numbers show normal life still far away

July 19 2020, by Cara Anna



A street artist spray paints a protective face mask over an old mural featuring a Venezuelan Indigenous man, in Caracas, Venezuela, Saturday, July 18, 2020, amid the new coronavirus pandemic. (AP Photo/Matias Delacroix)

South Africa on Saturday became one of the top five worst-hit countries in the coronavirus pandemic, as breathtaking new infection numbers

around the world were a reminder that a return to normal life is still far from sight.

The World Health Organization again reported a single-day record of new infections with 259,848.

South Africa's 350,879 cases make up roughly half of all confirmed infections on the African continent and its struggles are a sign of trouble to come for nations with fewer health care resources. South Africa now trails the U.S., Brazil, India and Russia—all far more populous countries—in the number of infections, surpassing Peru, after health authorities announced 13,285 new cases.

"The simple fact is that many South Africans are sitting ducks because they cannot comply with World Health Organization protocols on improved hygiene and social distancing," the foundation of former South African archbishop and Nobel Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu and his wife, Leah, warned in a statement.

South African Health Minister Zweli Mkhize said, "This is an urgent and important plea to all South Africans. The fight against COVID-19 is in our hands. We must act now." He expressed concern that "fatigue seems to have set in" and people are letting down their guard, with little social distancing and face masks abandoned.



Healthcare workers dressed in full protective gear organize their documents of data they have collected during a house-to-house new coronavirus testing drive, ringed by a produce market in the Villa Dolores neighborhood of El Alto, Bolivia, Saturday, July 18, 2020. (AP Photo/Juan Karita)

Elsewhere, daily death tolls have been reaching new highs in several U.S. states and India's infections are over 1 million. Experts believe the true numbers around the world are higher because of testing shortages and data collection issues in some nations.

The world on Saturday marked Mandela Day, remembering Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first Black president—another Nobel Peace Prize winner—and his legacy of fighting inequality. The country, however, remains the world's most unequal, and health officials have warned that the pandemic will lay that bare.

South Africa's new coronavirus epicenter, Gauteng province, hosts the cities of Johannesburg and Pretoria and one-quarter of the country's population of 57 million, with many poor people living in crowded conditions in the middle of a frosty Southern Hemisphere winter.



Health workers wait to screen people for COVID-19 symptoms at a temple in Mumbai, India, Saturday, July 18, 2020. India crossed 1 million coronavirus cases on Friday, third only to the United States and Brazil, prompting concerns about its readiness to confront an inevitable surge that could overwhelm hospitals and test the country's feeble health care system. (AP Photo/Rafiq Maqbool)

Mandela's message is "more relevant than ever," WHO Africa chief Matshidiso Moeti said, calling for equitable access to care.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who delivered the Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture, said that "COVID-19 has been likened to an X-ray, revealing fractures in the fragile skeleton of the societies we have built," adding that developed countries have "failed to deliver the support needed to help the developing world through these dangerous times."

Confirmed virus cases worldwide have topped 14.1 million and deaths rose above 600,000, according to Johns Hopkins University data. Infections are soaring in U.S. states like Florida, Texas, Arizona, fueled by the haphazard lifting of coronavirus lockdowns and the resistance of some Americans to wearing masks.

In the U.S., teams of military medics have been deployed in Texas and California to help hospitals deluged by patients. The surge of infections means that millions of American children are unlikely to return to classrooms full time in the fall.



A health worker takes a swab test of a women at a temple in Mumbai, India, Saturday, July 18, 2020. India crossed 1 million coronavirus cases on Friday, third only to the United States and Brazil, prompting concerns about its readiness to confront an inevitable surge that could overwhelm hospitals and test the country's feeble health care system. (AP Photo/Rafiq Maqbool)



A health worker screens an elderly woman for COVID—19 symptoms at a temple in Mumbai, India, Saturday, July 18, 2020. India crossed 1 million coronavirus cases on Friday, third only to the United States and Brazil, prompting concerns about its readiness to confront an inevitable surge that could overwhelm hospitals and test the country's feeble health care system. (AP Photo/Rafiq Maqbool)



An elderly woman walks down a flight of stairs, helped by a policewoman, after she gave her swab sample, at a temple in Mumbai, India, Saturday, July 18, 2020. India crossed 1 million coronavirus cases on Friday, third only to the United States and Brazil, prompting concerns about its readiness to confront an inevitable surge that could overwhelm hospitals and test the country's feeble health care system. (AP Photo/Rafiq Maqbool)



Parents wearing face masks to protect against the coronavirus take photos of students as they pose for a group photo at the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, Saturday, July 18, 2020. Authorities in a city in far western China have reduced subways, buses and taxis and closed off some residential communities amid a new coronavirus outbreak, according to Chinese media reports. They also placed restrictions on people leaving the city, including a suspension of subway service to the airport. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)



People wearing face masks to protect against the coronavirus sit on a railing at the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, Saturday, July 18, 2020. Authorities in a city in far western China have reduced subways, buses and taxis and closed off some residential communities amid a new coronavirus outbreak, according to Chinese media reports. They also placed restrictions on people leaving the city, including a suspension of subway service to the airport. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)



People protest against coronavirus trials in Africa, outside Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospita in the township of Soweto in Johannesburg, South Africa, Saturday, July 18, 2020, The first clinical trial in Africa for a COVID-19 vaccine started last week in South Africa. Experts note a worrying level of resistance and misinformation around testing on the continent. (AP Photo/Themba Hadebe)



People walk along a skywalk to Chris Hani Bardgwanath Hospital in the township of Soweto in Johannesburg, South Africa, Saturday, July 18, 2020. (AP Photo/Themba Hadebe)



An Indian paramilitary soldier walks back after performing religious rituals during the cremation of his colleague who died of COVID-19, at a crematorium in Srinagar, Indian controlled Kashmir, Saturday, July 18, 2020. India crossed 1 million coronavirus cases on Friday, third only to the United States and Brazil, prompting concerns about its readiness to confront an inevitable surge that could overwhelm hospitals and test the country's feeble health care system. (AP Photo/Dar Yasin)



Indian paramilitary soldiers carry the body of a colleague who died of COVID-19 for cremation at a crematorium in Srinagar, Indian controlled Kashmir, Saturday, July 18, 2020. India crossed 1 million coronavirus cases on Friday, third only to the United States and Brazil, prompting concerns about its readiness to confront an inevitable surge that could overwhelm hospitals and test the country's feeble health care system. (AP Photo/ Dar Yasin)



Palestinian Hamas police officers wear protective suits as they take part in a simulation of possible coronavirus infections in Gaza City, Saturday, July 18, 2020. (AP Photo/Khalil Hamra)



Palestinian medics wear protective suits as they take part in a simulation of possible coronavirus infections in Gaza City, Saturday, July 18, 2020. (AP Photo/Khalil Hamra)



Angami Naga boys wearing face masks sit vigil at a gate erected to check the entry of non-residents into Kohima village, one of Asia's largest villages, in the northeastern Indian state of Nagaland, Saturday, July 18, 2020. The indigenous Nagas have largely taken the fight against the coronavirus as the responsibility of the community, with local youth organizations and churches, among others, aiding government agencies. (AP Photo/Yirmiyan Arthur)



Numerous beach visitors are at summery temperatures on the North Sea beach of Schillig, Germany, Saturday, July 18, 2020. (Mohssen Assanimoghaddam/dpa via AP)



In this photo released by the official website of the office of the Iranian Presidency, President Hassan Rouhani attends a meeting of the national headquarters of the fight against the COVID-19, in Tehran, Iran, Saturday, July 18, 2020. He estimated as many as 25 million Iranians could have been infected with the coronavirus since the outbreak's beginning, citing an Iranian Health Ministry study that has so far not been made public, the state-run IRNA news agency reported. Writing in Farsi at top right reads, "The Presidency." (Iranian Presidency Office via AP)



Children wearing face masks to protect against the coronavirus sketch the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, Saturday, July 18, 2020. Authorities in a city in far western China have reduced subways, buses and taxis and closed off some residential communities amid a new coronavirus outbreak, according to Chinese media reports. They also placed restrictions on people leaving the city, including a suspension of subway service to the airport. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)



Two women look at the beach in Barcelona, Spain, Saturday, July 18, 2020. Police in Barcelona are closing access to a large area of the city's beaches due to the excess of sunbathers who decided to ignore the urgings of authorities to stay at home amid a resurgence of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Emilio Morenatti)

In India, a surge of 34,884 new cases was reported as local governments continue to re-impose focused lockdowns in several parts of the country.

In Iran, the president made the startling announcement that as many as 25 million Iranians could have been infected, the state-run IRNA news agency reported. Hassan Rouhani cited a new Health Ministry study that has not been made public. Iran has the Middle East's worst outbreak with more than 270,000 confirmed cases.

In Bangladesh, confirmed cases surpassed 200,000 but experts say the number is much higher as the country lacks adequate labs for testing. Most people in rural areas have stopped wearing masks and are thronging shopping centers ahead of the Islamic festival Eid al-Adha this month.

Scientists, meanwhile, poured cold water on British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's hope that the country may return to normal by Christmas.

A world where people can "go to work normally, travel on the buses and trains, go on holiday without restrictions, meet friends, shake hands, hug each other and so on—that's a long way off, unfortunately," without a vaccine, said epidemiologist John Edmunds, a member of the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies.

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