

WHO says no return to 'normal' as Latin America deaths pass US

July 13 2020, by Robin Millard With Hazel Ward In Madrid and Afp Bureaus



Exhausted medical workers in Peru, as Latin America's number of coronavirus deaths passed the US and Canada on Monday

Too many nations are mismanaging their coronavirus response, placing a return to normality a long way off, the World Health Organization

warned Monday as Latin America recorded the world's second-highest death toll.

With new infections spreading like wildfire, many countries were reimposing restrictions on Monday, locking down towns and cities and reintroducing measures to halt the spread of the sickness.

But WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that too many countries were "headed in the wrong direction" with governments giving out mixed messages that were undermining trust.

"There will be no return to the 'old normal' for the foreseeable future," he said, warning that without governments adopting a comprehensive strategy, the situation would get "worse and worse and worse".

Since the start of July, nearly 2.5 million new infections have been detected across the globe, with the number of cases doubling over the past six weeks, according to an AFP tally based on official figures.

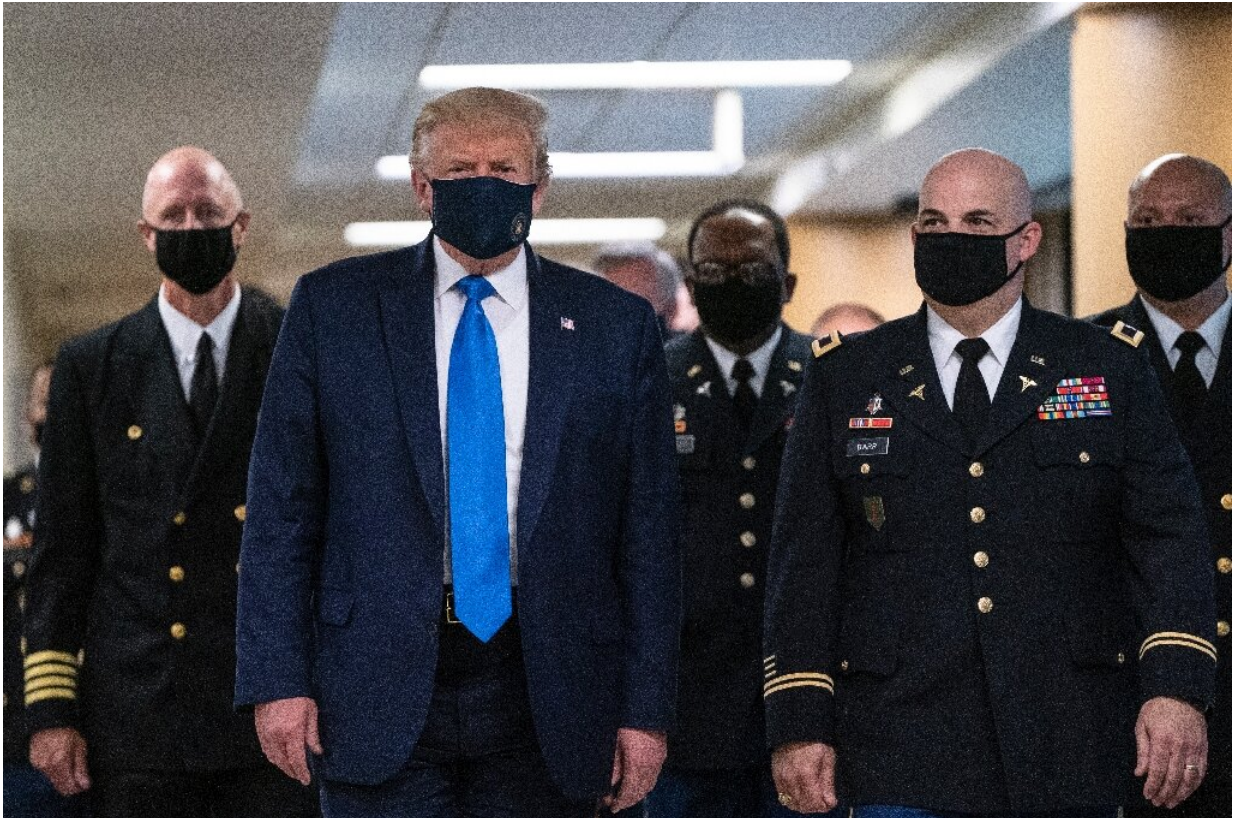
In Spain, regional officials were in a standoff with courts after a judge suspended a lockdown just hours after it was imposed on 160,000 people in the Catalonia city of Lerida following a sharp rise in cases.

Despite calls to respect the closure, many people were on the streets by mid-afternoon, with shops and bars still open, an AFP correspondent said.

It was the first such order given since Spain's lockdown ended on June 21 and the situation in the northeastern city was the most worrying among 120 outbreaks across a country where the virus has killed more than 28,400 people.

Reimposing lockdowns

South Africa has also reimposed a nationwide curfew to prevent a "coronavirus storm" from ravaging the continent's hardest-hit nation, where new infections have topped 12,000 per day.



The man in the presidential mask: Donald Trump wore a face mask for the first time in public

Morocco followed suit on Monday, locking down Tangiers, with public transport suspended, cafes and public spaces closed and movement restricted in the northern port city of a million inhabitants.

In Asia, the Philippines imposed a two-week lockdown on 250,000

people in the capital Manila as new infections soared, and Hong Kong stepped up precautions to combat a sudden spike in infections.

Restaurants there can only serve takeaway food after 6 pm, gyms, nightclubs, karaoke bars and beauty salons were shuttered and public gatherings were restricted to four people.

And two US Marine bases on Japan's Okinawa island have been locked down after a spike in cases with dozens infected and local officials expressing "serious doubts" about the US military's containment efforts.

Across the globe, the pandemic has infected nearly 13 million people, killed more than 566,000 and triggered massive economic damage in the seven months since it was detected in the Chinese city of Wuhan.

With cases surging in Latin America, the region on Monday declared a total of 144,758 deaths, passing the 144,023 recorded in the United States and Canada.

It now stands second only to Europe, where 202,505 people have died.

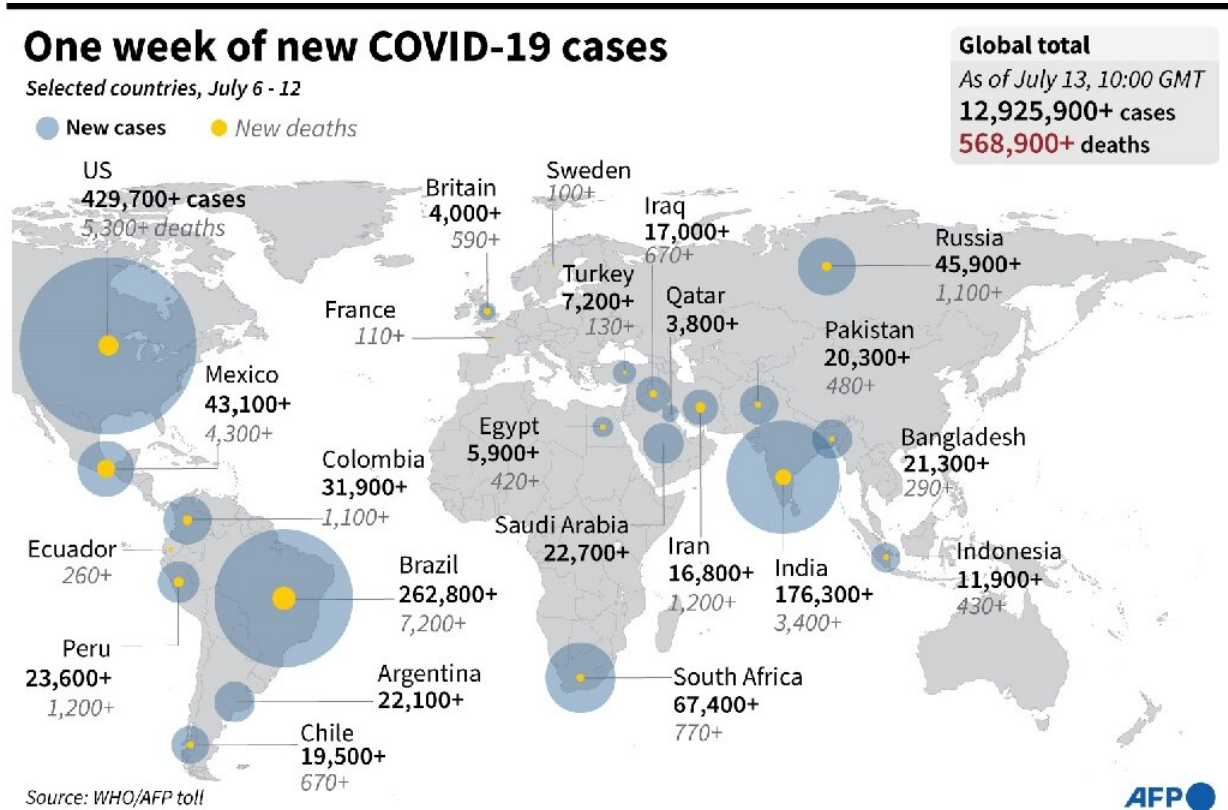
At the weekend, US President Donald Trump wore a face mask in public for the first time, in the world's worst-hit country where 135,171 people have died.

Mexico has become the country with the fourth-highest number of COVID-19 fatalities in the world, climbing to a total of 35,006 deaths and surpassing Italy.

And Iran, the worst-hit country in the Middle East, counted more than 200 new deaths on Monday, pushing its toll over 13,000.

The latest high-profile personality to test positive for COVID-19 was

Bollywood superstar and former Miss World Aishwarya Rai.



The countries with the largest number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in the past week

Millionaires' initiative: 'Tax us more'

With eyes keenly focused on the economic fallout, the IMF warned Monday that the Middle East and North Africa region was facing its worst downturn in 50 years, citing the "twin shock" of the virus and low oil prices.

The region's economy will contract by 5.7 percent this year and by up to

13 percent in conflict-hit nations, it said, warning of soaring poverty and unemployment, social unrest and spiralling debt.

Meanwhile more than 80 millionaires on Monday urged governments around the world to hike taxes on the super-wealthy to help fund the recovery.

In an open letter, "Millionaires for Humanity" said they should be taxed higher, "immediately, substantially, permanently".

"No, we are not the ones caring for the sick in intensive care wards, we are not driving the ambulances," wrote the signatories, among them Ben and Jerry's ice cream co-founder Jerry Greenfield and screenwriter Richard Curtis.

"But we do have money, lots of it. Money that is desperately needed now and will continue to be needed in the years ahead, as our world recovers from this crisis."

Scientists have urged people take social distancing more seriously, with a French expert warning that a fully effective vaccine was highly unlikely by 2021.

And in what may prove a blow to those who have recovered, researchers at Kings College London said COVID-19 survivors could lose their immunity, leaving them vulnerable to reinfection within months.

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