

Worldwide virus cases top 20 million, doubling in six weeks

August 11 2020, by Mark Stevenson, Nicky Forster and Michelle R. Smith



In this handout photo taken on Thursday, Aug. 6, 2020, and provided by Russian Direct Investment Fund, an employee shows a new vaccine at the Nikolai Gamaleya National Center of Epidemiology and Microbiology in Moscow, Russia. Russia on Tuesday, Aug. 11 became the first country to approve a coronavirus vaccine for use in tens of thousands of its citizens despite international skepticism about injections that have not completed clinical trials and were studied in only dozens of people for less than two months. (Alexander

Zemlianichenko Jr/ Russian Direct Investment Fund via AP)

It took six months for the world to reach 10 million confirmed cases of the coronavirus. It took just over six weeks for that number to double.

The worldwide count of known COVID-19 infections climbed past 20 million on Monday, with more than half of them from just three countries: the U.S., India and Brazil, according to the tally kept by Johns Hopkins University.

The average number of new cases per day in the U.S. has declined in recent weeks but is still running high at over 54,000, versus almost 59,000 in India and nearly 44,000 in Brazil.

The severe and sustained crisis in the U.S.—over 5 million cases and 163,000 deaths, easily the highest totals of any country—has dismayed and surprised many around the world, given the nation's vaunted scientific ingenuity and the head start it had over Europe and Asia to prepare.

South Africa, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Argentina, Russia and the Philippines round out the list of the top 10 countries contributing the most new cases to the global tally since July 22, according to an Associated Press analysis of Johns Hopkins data through Monday.

The real number of people infected by the virus around the world is believed to be much higher—perhaps 10 times higher in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—given testing limitations and the many mild cases that have gone unreported or unrecognized.



Health workers screen people for COVID-19 symptoms in Dharavi, one of Asia's biggest slums, in Mumbai, India, Tuesday, Aug. 11, 2020. India has the third-highest coronavirus caseload in the world after the United States and Brazil. (AP Photo/Rafiq Maqbool)

In other developments, Russia on Tuesday became the first country to approve a vaccine against the virus. While a proven coronavirus vaccine would be an epic medical breakthrough, the move raised alarms among scientists because the shots have not been subjected to large-scale testing in humans. They have only been studied in dozens of people, not the thousands typically involved.

Some of the worst-hit nations have been those whose leaders have downplayed the severity of COVID-19, undercut the advice of health experts and pushed unproven remedies.

President Donald Trump, Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro and Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, for example, all rarely wear masks and have resisted calls for strict lockdowns. Trump and Bolsonaro have promoted the anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine, even though studies have shown it to be useless against the virus, with potentially deadly side effects.



A civic worker fumigates a lane in Mumbai, India, Tuesday, Aug. 11, 2020. India has the third-highest coronavirus caseload in the world after the United States and Brazil. (AP Photo/Rafiq Maqbool)

In the U.S., Mexico and Brazil, testing has been criticized as inadequate. While the U.S. has ramped up testing in recent months, Americans have faced discouragingly long lines and delays in getting the results. In Mexico, 47% of tests are coming back positive, suggesting that only seriously ill people are getting screened.

Contact tracing, which has helped authorities in other countries get a handle on the spread, has also been criticized as insufficient in all three countries.

The U.S., with about 4% of the world's population, accounts for about 25% of the known coronavirus infections and 22% of the deaths.

Mexico has reported nearly 500,000 cases and more than 50,300 deaths, but the president's point man on the epidemic, Assistant Health Secretary Hugo López-Gatell, said a full lockdown would prove too costly for people with little savings and tenuous daily incomes.



People wearing face masks wait their turn to be called for a PCR test for the COVID-19 outside a local clinic in Santa Coloma de Gramanet in Barcelona, Spain, Tuesday, Aug. 11, 2020. (AP Photo/Emilio Morenatti)



Fruit and vegetable vendors, wearing masks against the spread of the COVID-19 infections, wait for customers at a market in Bucharest, Romania, Tuesday, Aug. 11, 2020. Romania is faced with an increasing number of COVID-19 infections and related deaths over the past weeks, the highest levels since the pandemic started in the country in February, blamed mostly on people not observing the prevention regulations, like correctly wearing a face mask. (AP Photo/Andreea Alexandru)



Health workers return after screening people for COVID-19 symptoms in Dharavi, one of Asia's biggest slums, in Mumbai, India, Tuesday, Aug. 11, 2020. India has the third-highest coronavirus caseload in the world after the United States and Brazil. (AP Photo/Rafiq Maqbool)



People eat at a rooftop restaurant close to the historical Badshahi Mosque, following an ease in restrictions that had been imposed to help control the coronavirus, in Lahore, Pakistan, Tuesday, Aug. 11, 2020. Pakistan's daily virus infection rate has stayed under 1,000 for more than four weeks prompting the government to further ease restrictions for restaurants, parks, gyms and cinemas. (AP Photo/K.M. Chaudary)



Artists protest outside the Fine Arts Palace to demand financial aid amid the economic slowdown brought by partial lockdowns to contain the spread of COVID-19 in Mexico City, Tuesday, Aug. 11, 2020. The National Artistic Resistance (RAN) organization is asking the government for artists to be included in rescue budgets and given social support. (AP Photo/Marco Ugarte)



A man wearing a face mask to protect against the coronavirus sits in front of a mural at a shopping and office complex in Beijing, Tuesday, Aug. 11, 2020. Mainland China and semi-autonomous Hong Kong saw declines in their recent outbreaks Tuesday. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)



A little girl wearing a face mask amid the new coronavirus pandemic gets her temperature taken at a police checkpoint, at the entrance to the province of Havana, Cuba, Monday, Aug. 10, 2020. Cuban authorities on Monday re-imposed measures aimed at containing the spread of COVID-19, restricting inter-provincial travel, closing beaches, bars, restaurants, and keeping the main airport closed to international travel. (AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa)



Wearing a mask to curb the spread of the new coronavirus, Martha Gonzalez Reyes, 76, sells roses outside Metro Hidalgo in central Mexico City, Monday, Aug. 10, 2020. After four months at home, Gonzalez returned to selling on August 1, but said business hasn't fully rebounded. "People have less money to spend, and they don't want to go out and get infected," said Gonzalez. (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)



People wearing face masks to protect against the coronavirus ride an escalator past a sign of a nail salon at a shopping and office complex in Beijing, Tuesday, Aug. 11, 2020. Mainland China and semi-autonomous Hong Kong saw declines in their recent outbreaks Tuesday. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)



Teacher Inggit Andini, right, wearing a face shield as a precaution against the coronavirus outbreak, speaks as her students in a makeshift classroom at her residence in Tangerang, Indonesia, Monday, Aug. 10, 2020. Andini offered free extra lessons for students who lack access to the internet as the school where she works at remain closed and switched to online learning due to the outbreak. (AP Photo/Tatan Syuflana)



Wearing a mask to curb the spread of the new coronavirus, Angel Pandal, 25, talks to a neighbor while taking a break from recycling destroyed washing machines, in Lima, Peru, Monday, Aug. 10, 2020. "After the start of the emergency due to the pandemic, there is less and less work, the economic situation is very tough here," Pandal said. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)

"We do not want a solution that would, in social terms, be more costly than the disease itself," he said.

Cases have begun to rise significantly in Caracas, Venezuela, perhaps one of the world's least-prepared cities to face the pandemic.

The country has been under a lockdown since March, but limited testing, open defiance of quarantine measures and the return of tens of

thousands of Venezuelan migrants from countries with higher caseloads have resulted in a steady expansion that is starting to overwhelm hospitals with scarce supplies.

"What has been successful in other countries is massive testing and isolating the population that is sick," said Domingo Subero, 66, an engineer worried about the situation in Caracas. "Here, neither of those two things is happening."

Elsewhere around the world, New Zealand, which has been praised for quickly getting the virus under control, reported the first cases of local transmission in the country in 102 days. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said four cases were discovered in a single Auckland household.

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