

After highest virus increase yet, Iraq warns it may 'lose control'

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Iraq on Friday recorded its highest single-day rise in COVID-19 cases since the start of the pandemic, prompting authorities to warn hospitals may "lose control" in the coming days.

According to the Iraqi health ministry, 5,036 new coronavirus infections were confirmed on Friday, bringing the total number of cases across the country to 252,075, of which 191,368 had recovered, but 7,359 had died.

The health ministry attributed the spike to recent "large gatherings" that took place without recommended [safety measures](#), including mask-wearing or social distancing.

That included the marking on August 30 of Ashura, a major Muslim day of mourning that commemorates the killing of the Prophet Mohammed's grandson Hussein in 680 AD.

On that day, tens of thousands of Shiite Muslims converged on the holy city of Karbala in southern Iraq.

Karbala's authorities introduced new measures to stem the spread of the virus, including restricting access to areas of worship and widespread spraying of disinfectants.

But the [health ministry](#) warned the measures weren't enough.

"The number of cases is expected to escalate further in the coming days, which we fear will lead our [health](#) institutions to lose control as they try to deal with these large numbers," its statement on Friday said.

"This will lead to an increase in the number of deaths, after we made headway in reducing them over the past few weeks," it added.

Iraq's hospitals have already been worn down by decades of conflict and poor investment, with shortages in medicines, hospital beds and even [protective equipment](#) for doctors.

Ahead of Ashura, the World Health Organization had warned that COVID-19 cases in Iraq were rising at an "alarming rate" and said Iraq should take action to end the community outbreak "at all costs".

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