

India's coronavirus cases cross 8 million, behind US

October 29 2020, by Ashok Sharma



A health worker uses a rapid kit to test for COVID-19 at a testing center in New Delhi, India, Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020. India's confirmed coronavirus caseload surpassed 8 million on Thursday with daily infections dipping to the lowest level this week, as concerns grew over a major Hindu festival season and winter setting in. (AP Photo/Altaf Qadri)

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India's trajectory is moving toward the worst-hit country, the United States, which has over 8.8 million cases.

The Health Ministry reported another 49,881 infections and 517 fatalities in the past 24 hours, raising the [death toll](#) to 120,527.

Life in India is edging back to pre-virus levels with shops, businesses, subway trains and [movie theaters](#) reopening and the country's third-largest state of Bihar with a population of about 122 million people holding elections.

But health experts warn that mask and distancing fatigue is setting in and can lead to a fresh wave of infections.

India saw a steep rise in cases in July and added more than 2 million in August and another 3 million in September. But it is seeing a slower pace of [coronavirus](#) spread since mid-September, when daily infections touched a record of 97,894 with the highest number of deaths at 1,275. According to the Health Ministry, more than 7.3 million Indians have recovered from COVID-19.

Dr. T. Jacob John, a retired virologist, said that in most parts of India the [infection](#) curve was never flattened and the number of people who are now susceptible to the virus had decreased.



A health worker takes a nasal swab sample at a COVID-19 testing center in New Delhi, India, Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020. India's confirmed coronavirus caseload surpassed 8 million on Thursday with daily infections dipping to the lowest level this week, as concerns grew over a major Hindu festival season and winter setting in. (AP Photo/Altaf Qadri)

He warned that the ongoing festival season was likely to increase the speed of the viral spread, resulting in localized outbreaks where people gathered without masks and didn't adhere to social distancing.

Even as new cases are on a decline nationwide, the Indian capital appears to be heading toward another surge in infections. It reported its worst day with 4,853 cases on Wednesday, after falling to less than 1,000 new cases per day last month.

"I am shocked, but not surprised," said Arvind Kumar, a New Delhi doctor. "There seems to be a sense of complacency in adhering to mask and distancing norms."

Kumar warned that the rising air pollution during winter months in the capital could have "a deleterious effect on the incidence (of virus) and the mortality rate."

Winters have become a time of health woes in New Delhi, with a toxic haze obscuring the sky and blocking sunlight. Pollution levels soar to severe levels, which worsen respiratory illnesses.



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People wait for their turn at a COVID-19 testing center in New Delhi, India, Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020. India's confirmed coronavirus caseload surpassed 8 million on Thursday with daily infections dipping to the lowest level this week, as concerns grew over a major Hindu festival season and winter setting in. (AP Photo/Altaf Qadri)



A health worker takes a nasal swab sample as others wait for their turn at a COVID-19 testing center in New Delhi, India, Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020. India's confirmed coronavirus caseload surpassed 8 million on Thursday with daily infections dipping to the lowest level this week, as concerns grew over a major Hindu festival season and winter setting in. (AP Photo/Altaf Qadri)



Migrant laborers from Tamil Nadu state wearing face masks as a precaution against the coronavirus wait to be hired for the day, by the side of a road in Kochi, Kerala state, India, Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020. India's confirmed coronavirus caseload surpassed 8 million on Thursday with daily infections dipping to the lowest level this week. (AP Photo/R S Iyer)



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Laborers wearing face masks as a precaution against the coronavirus leave for work in the morning in Kochi, Kerala state, India, Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020. India's confirmed coronavirus caseload surpassed 8 million on Thursday with daily infections dipping to the lowest level this week. (AP Photo/R S Iyer)



A man wearing mask as a precaution against the coronavirus prepares to alight from a bus in Kochi, Kerala state, India, Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020. India's confirmed coronavirus caseload surpassed 8 million on Thursday with daily infections dipping to the lowest level this week. (AP Photo/R S Iyer)



A cyclist wearing a face mask as a precaution against the coronavirus pedals past daily wage laborers waiting to be hired for the day, by a roadside in the morning in Kochi, Kerala state, India, Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020. India's confirmed coronavirus caseload surpassed 8 million on Thursday with daily infections dipping to the lowest level this week. (AP Photo/R S Iyer)



Shoppers wearing face masks as a precaution against the coronavirus watch a vehicle carrying municipal officers looking for offenders flouting compulsory rules for face masks in public, at a market in Bengaluru, India, Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020. India's confirmed coronavirus caseload surpassed 8 million on Thursday with daily infections dipping to the lowest level this week, as concerns grew over a major Hindu festival season and winter setting in. India's trajectory is moving toward the worst-hit country, the United States, which has over 8.8 million cases. (AP Photo/Aijaz Rahi)



A flower vendor, left, wearing face mask as a precaution against the coronavirus interacts with a buyer in Bengaluru, India, Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020. India's confirmed coronavirus caseload surpassed 8 million on Thursday with daily infections dipping to the lowest level this week, as concerns grew over a major Hindu festival season and winter setting in. India's trajectory is moving toward the worst-hit country, the United States, which has over 8.8 million cases. (AP Photo/Aijaz Rahi)



Migrant workers from Tamil Nadu state wearing face masks as a precaution against the coronavirus wait to be hired for the day by a roadside in the morning in Kochi, Kerala state, India, Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020. India's confirmed coronavirus caseload surpassed 8 million on Thursday with daily infections dipping to the lowest level this week. (AP Photo/R S Iyer)



A porter wearing a face mask as a precaution against the coronavirus navigates his way through a narrow alley at a market area in Bengaluru, India, Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020. India's confirmed coronavirus caseload surpassed 8 million on Thursday with daily infections dipping to the lowest level this week, as concerns grew over a major Hindu festival season and winter setting in. India's trajectory is moving toward the worst-hit country, the United States, which has over 8.8 million cases. (AP Photo/Aijaz Rahi)



People wearing face masks as a precaution against the coronavirus shop at a market area in Bengaluru, India, Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020. India's confirmed coronavirus caseload surpassed 8 million on Thursday with daily infections dipping to the lowest level this week, as concerns grew over a major Hindu festival season and winter setting in. (AP Photo/Aijaz Rahi)



An Indian family wearing face masks as a precaution against the coronavirus bargain for a ride with an autorickshaw driver in Bengaluru, India, Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020. India's confirmed coronavirus caseload surpassed 8 million on Thursday with daily infections dipping to the lowest level this week, as concerns grew over a major Hindu festival season and winter setting in. India's trajectory is moving toward the worst-hit country, the United States, which has over 8.8 million cases. (AP Photo/Aijaz Rahi)



A man pleads with municipal officers as he is fined for not wearing a face mask in Bengaluru, India, Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020. India's confirmed coronavirus caseload surpassed 8 million on Thursday with daily infections dipping to the lowest level this week, as concerns grew over a major Hindu festival season and winter setting in. (AP Photo/Aijaz Rahi)



A vendor has his face covered with a cloth as a precaution against the coronavirus as he displays artwork for sale at a market in Bengaluru, India, Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020. India's confirmed coronavirus caseload surpassed 8 million on Thursday with daily infections dipping to the lowest level this week, as concerns grew over a major Hindu festival season and winter setting in. India's trajectory is moving toward the worst-hit country, the United States, which has over 8.8 million cases. (AP Photo/Aijaz Rahi)

Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of Brown University's School of Public Health and a leading infectious disease expert, said a research has shown that a combination of cooler and drier air spreads the virus more efficiently.

"In drier air, those droplets tend to be smaller and can linger in the air,"

Jha said.

India, with a population of 1.4 billion, aims to provide a coronavirus vaccine to 250 million people by July 2021. The government said it was planning to receive 450 million to 500 million vaccine doses and would ensure "equitable access."

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