

# Iraq records new surge in COVID cases

March 17 2021

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Iraq recorded a new high of 5,663 new coronavirus cases Wednesday, health officials said, nearly two weeks since the visit of Pope Francis to the country.

The number of Iraqis infected since the COVID-19 pandemic began

now stands at over 768,000 including 13,827 deaths, with 33 of those in the past 24 hours, according to health ministry figures Wednesday.

Health officials carry out some 40,000 tests every day, in a population of 40 million people.

Despite the rise, the government said it was easing restrictions aimed to stem the spread of coronavirus, including partially lifting a curfew.

Pope Francis toured Iraq from March 5-8, celebrating prayers with crowds of faithful, including in a stadium filled with thousands of worshippers in Erbil.

As is common across Iraq, few among the crowds wore masks—and the recent introduction of a fine has made little difference to that.

Numbers of cases in Iraq have fluctuated over the months, peaking in September at around 5,000 new cases per day, dropping to around 800 cases a day in December, then rising in late February to over 4,000.

Iraq suffers from a chronic shortages of drugs and [medical care](#), and those patients who can often prefer to source oxygen tanks for treatment at home, rather than go to overcrowded and run-down hospitals.

Baghdad has received only 50,000 vaccines, China's Sinopharm jab.

While the [government](#) boasts of plans to purchase 16 million doses, parliament has still not voted on the 2021 budget.

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