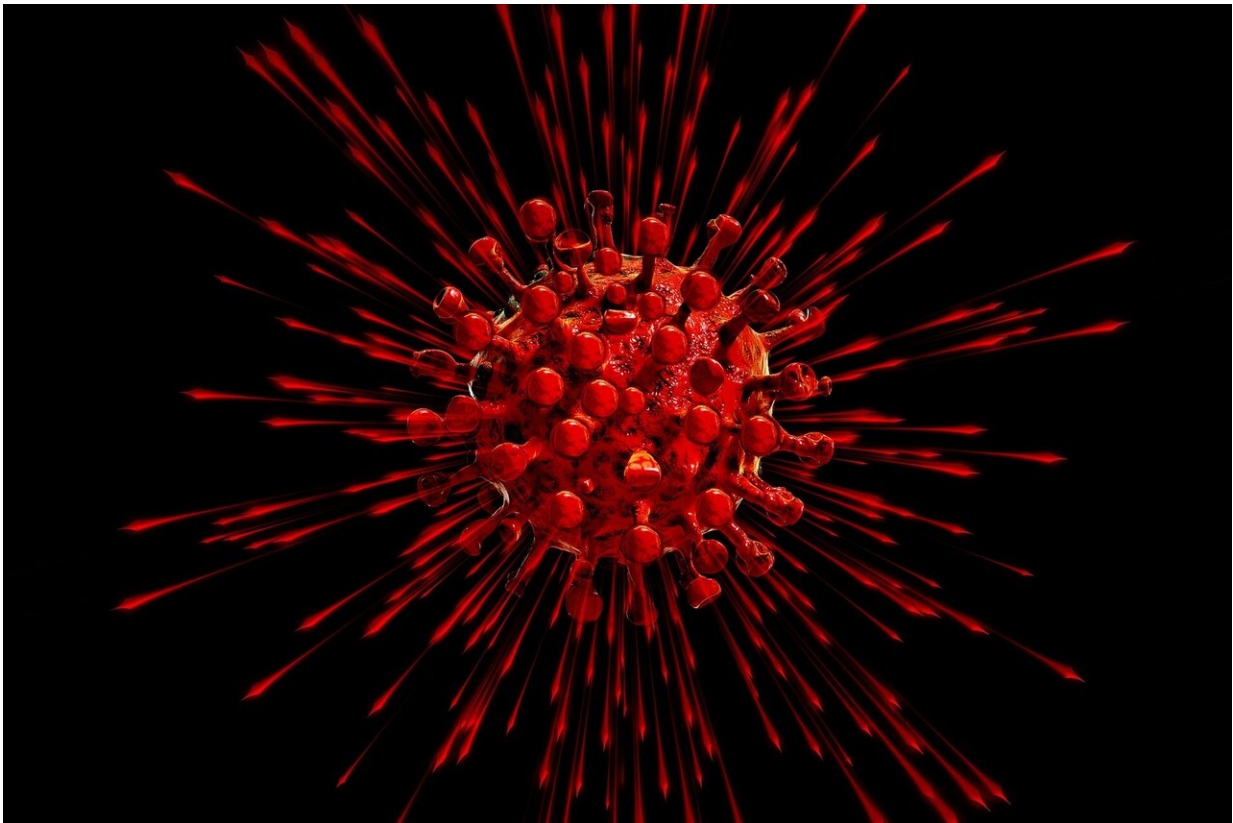


Variant sweeps Hungary to world-high weekly COVID death rate

March 25 2021



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Hungary had the world's highest COVID-19 death rate compared to population over the last week, according to AFP data on Thursday, as hospitals face unprecedented pressure from surging cases of a virus

variant.

The [death toll](#) in the EU member state with a population of just under 10 million has risen more than 41 percent during the past week and set a new daily record of 272 on Thursday.

The latest figures push the country's seven-day average death rate per 100,000 inhabitants to a world-high 15.7, well ahead of the Czech Republic (12.7), Bosnia (12), Slovakia (10.5), and Bulgaria (10.5).

Infections have been surging since February, when a more infectious variant of COVID-19 that was first found in England began to spread.

A total of 9,637 new cases were reported Thursday, according to official data.

Almost 12,000 [coronavirus](#) patients are currently being treated in hospitals, including nearly 1,500 on ventilators.

Experts said the British variant now accounts for 80-90 percent of new infections and that virus-related [hospital](#) admissions are expected to peak in April.

"The situation is serious but the system has sufficient capacity to handle the higher numbers," Prime Minister Viktor Orban's chief of staff Gergely Gulyas said Thursday.

"There are enough spare beds and ventilators, and also personnel," Gulyas told a briefing, refuting a warning by the Hungarian Chamber of Doctors (MOK) earlier this week that hospitals are becoming overloaded and lack medical personnel to treat the surge in patients.

A MOK official said that hospital conditions could soon resemble those

reported a year ago in the Italian province of Bergamo, Europe's first major virus flashpoint.

"Operating rooms have shut down, their ventilators are occupied by COVID patients fighting for their lives," said a MOK statement.

Some 500 medical students have been authorised to help while some hospitals have also sought volunteers to assist in COVID-19 wards.

While media are not permitted to enter hospitals, [healthcare workers](#) have described overwhelmed conditions to local media.

The surge comes as Hungary has the second-highest vaccination rate in the EU, thanks to its use of Chinese-made Sinopharm and Russian Sputnik V vaccines, as well as western-developed jabs delivered by Brussels.

This week Budapest approved another two vaccines produced outside the bloc: a second Chinese jab made by CanSino, and "Covishield" the Indian-made version of the Anglo-Swedish AstraZeneca vaccine.

Around 1.7 million people—more than 18 percent of the 9.8 million population—have been vaccinated, including over half a million who have received a second jab, Gulyas said Thursday.

Once the vaccination rate reaches 2.5 million, or roughly a quarter of the population, schools can reopen, at the earliest April 12 or 19, he added.

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