

'Act now': Africa medics warn of India-like COVID surge

April 29 2021



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Africa risks being overrun by coronavirus infections if urgent measures are not taken to avert a similar disaster to the "very concerning" crisis in India, the continent's disease control body said Thursday.

India, a vast subcontinent with a population similar to that of Africa, is fighting an explosion of infections, with jarring scenes of citizens desperately seeking oxygen and medicines.

This has prompted fears that as new variants spread, Africa's fragile healthcare systems could crash.

"We are watching in total disbelief what is happening in India. The situation in [india](#) is very, very concerning to us as a continent. It speaks to the fact that we as a continent must be very prepared," Dr. John Nkengasong, director of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), told a press conference.

Despite early predictions of disaster on the continent, Africa has so far been spared compared to other regions, counting 3.1 percent of global virus cases and about four percent of global deaths, according to the Africa CDC.

India, like many African nations, took strict early measures to combat the virus and it appeared the country had been spared the worst because of its young population.

However a new variant and mass gatherings have led to a surge in infections that has overwhelmed Indian hospitals, crematoriums and graveyards.

"It is a wake up call. We cannot be indifferent to what is happening in India. We must act now, decisively and collectively," said Nkengasong.

The African Union will convene an emergency meeting with member states' health ministers on May 8.

"We need to regroup and prepare ourselves," said Nkengasong.

India on Thursday reported 3,645 deaths and almost 380,000 cases in the last 24 hours.

Africa CDC urged a return to the basics of heeding public health guidelines to keep infections at bay by avoiding mass gatherings and wearing face masks.

"Masks work. They are the only 'vaccines' we have," said Nkengasong.

Africa still lags behind in its inoculation campaign, with the process suffering a setback after India, which manufactures the shots supplied through the global vaccine-sharing facility Covax, decided to reduce exports to address domestic needs.

But Nkengasong said vaccine hesitancy was also hindering uptake.

Some countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, have had to return jabs to the Covax facility for redistribution after failing to use them with expiry fast approaching. Jabs have also expired in South Sudan and Malawi.

So far, the continent has administered 17.9 million doses of vaccines.

© 2021 AFP

Citation: 'Act now': Africa medics warn of India-like COVID surge (2021, April 29) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-04-africa-medics-india-like-covid-surge.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.