

# Brazil COVID cases still soaring among unprotected majority

April 21 2021, by Mauricio Savarese and Tatiana Pollastri

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Police break up a social gathering during an operation against illegal and clandestine gatherings that authorities believe are partly responsible for fueling the spread of COVID-19, at a party hall in Sao Paulo, Brazil, early Saturday, April 17, 2021. (AP Photo/Marcelo Chello)

Brazil's slowly unfolding vaccination program appears to have slowed

the pace of deaths among the nation's elderly, according to death certificate data, but COVID-19 is still taking a rising toll as unprotected younger people get sick.

People 80 and over accounted for a quarter of the nation's COVID-19 deaths in February, but less than a fifth in March, according to data provided to The Associated Press on Tuesday by Arpen-Brasil, an association which represents thousands of the notaries who record [death certificates](#) in Brazil.

But relatively few beyond the elderly have been protected: Less than 9 million of Brazil's 210 million residents have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, according to Our World in Data, an online research site.

Confirmed new infections from the virus among all age groups jumped about 70 percent between December and March: Reported cases rose from 1.3 million in December to 1.5 million in January, to 1.36 million in February and to 2.25 million in March.

But among people aged 20 to 59 the [death](#) toll tripled from February to March, hitting 23,366, according to the notaries.

Gustavo Renato Fiscarely, the president of Arpen-Brasil, said the figures show the importance of vaccines as well as the danger of people letting down their guard. "There needs to be precaution by [younger people](#), who have been proportionally more affected by the number of deaths."



A woman presents her identification as police break up a social gathering during an operation against illegal and clandestine gatherings that authorities believe are partly responsible for fueling the spread of COVID-19, at a party hall in Sao Paulo, Brazil, early Saturday, April 17, 2021. (AP Photo/Marcelo Chello)

Health experts blame that lack of caution for a similar pattern across the continent.

"We are not acting like a region in the midst of a worsening outbreak," Dr. Carissa F. Etienne, head of the Pan-American Health Organization, said last week, complaining that the regional weekly death toll was higher than at any point in 2020.

"Despite ongoing transmission in many places, restrictions have been relaxed. Crowds are back, and people are gathering indoors and taking public transportation, often without masks," she said.

Experts complain that even Brazilians who want to isolate are often forced to go to work because government welfare payments meant to let people stay home were sharply reduced in the first months of this year.

Brazil's vaccine program has suffered repeated delays, but President Jair Bolsonaro has disregarded calls from health experts and some governors to impose a nationwide lockdown to slow the virus' spread.



Doctor Malek Imad treats 34-year-old COVID-19 patient Everton Barbosa Godoy at the emergency unit of a field hospital in Ribeirao Pires, greater Sao Paulo area, Brazil, Tuesday, April 13, 2021. (AP Photo/Andre Penner)

In the absence of countrywide restrictions, unvaccinated people remain vulnerable to the so-called Brazilian variant that has rapidly spread across the country—and Latin America as a whole.

"The new P.1 variant is much more transmissible, and very probably it is also much more aggressive. And it is contaminating a lot of young people," said Margareth Dalcolmo, a pneumologist and researcher at the state-run Fiocruz Institute.

Local leaders have found it hard to enforce restrictions while Bolsonaro is urging people to ignore them.

Sao Paulo state's government imposed limited hours for bars and restaurants, but they were widely violated. In the seven weeks through April 19, more than 500 establishments were fined for violating the rules and police have detained thousands of fun-seekers.

Eduardo Brotero, who helps head a police task force targeting clandestine parties, described one April 11 raid to The Associated Press:



Healthcare workers transfer patients from ambulances to the HRAN public hospital in Brasilia, Brazil, Friday, April 16, 2021. Lack of required medicines is the latest pandemic problem to befall Brazil, which is experiencing a brutal COVID-19 outbreak that has flooded the nation's intensive care units. (AP Photo/Eraldo Peres)



A policeman talks with a woman outside a night club after it was shut down during a police operation against illegal and clandestine gatherings that authorities believe are partly responsible for fuelling the spread of COVID-19, in Sao Paulo, Brazil, early Sunday, April 11, 2021. (AP Photo/Andre Penner)



A woman flashes a V sign as police break up a social gathering during an operation against illegal and clandestine gatherings that authorities believe are partly responsible for fueling the spread of COVID-19, at a party hall in Sao Paulo, Brazil, early Saturday, April 17, 2021. (AP Photo/Marcelo Chello)





A 43-year-old patient suspected of having COVID-19 is transferred from an ambulance into the HRAN public hospital in Brasilia, Brazil, Wednesday, April 14, 2021. (AP Photo/Eraldo Peres)



Doctor Malek Imad treats 34-year-old COVID-19 patient Everton Barbosa Godoy at the emergency unit of a field hospital in Ribeirao Pires, greater Sao Paulo area, Brazil, Tuesday, April 13, 2021. (AP Photo/Andre Penner)



Carlos Alberto holds out his left arm during the burial service for his 41-year-old wife Aparecida de Freitas, who died from complications related to COVID-19, in the Inhauma cemetery, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Thursday, April 15, 2021. (AP Photo/Bruna Prado)

"There were almost 100 people drinking and smoking hookahs. There was even a barbecue inside, with no [security measures](#), even in this period in which every day we face these enormous death figures."

Brazil has seen almost 375,000 deaths from the virus, a toll second only to that of the United States. Nearly half that total has come so far in 2021 . The seven-day average [death toll](#) surged to above 3,000, though the figure has retreated slightly over the last few days.

Everton Godoy, 34, is among these younger COVID-19 patients. He was laid up in a [field hospital](#)'s infirmary April 13 in the small city of Ribeirao Pires on Sao Paulo's outskirts and said he believes he was infected while working at a produce shop.

"This disease has no age, and it's a very sad disease," Godoy said with labored breaths. "From one day to the next, unfortunately, it takes people away."

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