

COVID cases hit 2 million in Iran 'meteoric' spike

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The number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Iran passed the two-million mark Thursday, while the daily caseload set a new record high in what a health official warned amounted to a "meteoric" spike.

As the Islamic republic reached the grim milestone, some [health experts](#) called for a lockdown of the capital Tehran to contain the country's fourth COVID-19 wave.

Iran is battling the Middle East's deadliest coronavirus outbreak, and officials have blamed the latest surge on trips made during last month's Persian New Year holidays.

Over the past 24 hours, the country officially recorded 22,586 new cases of infection, reaching a new high, health ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said.

This marks an increase of more than 1,600 cases over the previous record, set just the day before.

Iran also recorded an additional 185 virus-related deaths, Lari said, bringing the total to 63,884.

Daily fatalities and infections had remained relatively stable below the 100 and 7,000 mark in January, rising only slightly until a sharp increase in late March.

Iran's conservative and reformist press Thursday blasted President Hassan Rouhani's government for allowing holiday travel in the face of an expected new wave.

It came after a top official said some in the national virus taskforce had opposed a travel ban before the holidays.

"Some prevented us from using the (new year)'s golden opportunity to put out the coronavirus fire," the deputy health minister, Iraj Harirchi, said Wednesday.

He described the COVID infection rate as "meteoric" and said it was now "highly probable" that Iran would suffer 600 deaths a day.

Some officials, including Health Minister Saeed Namaki, have admitted actual virus numbers are likely higher than official figures.

Payam Tabresi, a health expert at Tehran's Masih Daneshvari hospital, told Ebtakar daily that locking down the capital for "at least two weeks" was the "only way".

"The situation is bad, One really cannot imagine it being any worse," Tabresi said.

'Lack of trust'

Authorities had warned of a rise in the spread of the more contagious British variant of a fourth wave prior to the holidays, strongly advising against travel.

"We've now lost the reins" of the virus, Namaki said, complaining "no one listened" to him regarding holiday trips.

The roads were filled with travellers, regardless of advise from authorities.

Quoted by government-run Iran daily, Hadi Khaniki, a university communications lecturer, attributed the disregard for such advise to a "lack of trust and a gap" between the people and authorities.

This leads citizens to consider the state's decision-making as not "in line with their interests", he added.

Dozens of towns and cities including Tehran are classified as "red", the

highest rating on the [coronavirus](#) risk scale, requiring all non-essential businesses to close.

Iran has avoided imposing a full lockdown on its population of 82 million since the pandemic started more than a year ago.

Instead, it has resorted to limited and shifting measures, such as temporary bans on travel or businesses.

The country launched its vaccination drive in February but the campaign has progressed slower than authorities had hoped.

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