

With 200,000 in 1 day, India skyrockets past 14M virus cases

April 15 2021, by Ashok Sharma



A police officer tries to control a crowd waiting to board trains at Lokmanya Tilak Terminus in Mumbai, India, Wednesday, April 14, 2021. India's worst-hit and richest state Maharashtra will impose stricter restrictions for 15 days on Wednesday in an effort to stem the surge of coronavirus infections that is threatening to overcome hospitals. (AP Photo/Rafiq Maqbool)

India reported more than 200,000 new coronavirus cases Thursday, skyrocketing past 14 million overall as an intensifying outbreak puts a grim weight on its fragile health care system.

In the capital, New Delhi, more than a dozen hotels and wedding banquet halls were ordered to be converted into COVID-19 centers attached to hospitals.

"The surge is alarming," said S.K. Sarin, a government health expert in New Delhi.

The bustle of India's biggest city and financial capital, Mumbai, ebbed under lockdown-like curbs to curb the spread of the virus. The action imposed by worst-hit Maharashtra state Wednesday night closed most industries, businesses and public places and limits the movement of people for 15 days, but didn't stop train and air services.

In recent days, migrant workers hauling backpacks have swarmed overcrowded trains leaving Mumbai, an exodus among panic-stricken day laborers.

In addition to the 200,739 new cases of infection, the Health Ministry also reported 1,038 fatalities from COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, taking deaths to 173,123 since the pandemic started last year.

India's total cases are second behind the United States and its deaths are fourth behind the U.S., Brazil and Mexico. The actual numbers may be much higher with limited testing among India's nearly 1.4 billion people.



A stray dogs rests at a deserted Marine Drive following restrictions in Mumbai, India, Wednesday April 14, 2021. The teeming metropolis of Mumbai and other parts of Maharashtra, the Indian state worst hit by the pandemic, face stricter restrictions for 15 days starting Wednesday in an effort to stem the surge of coronavirus infections. (AP Photo/Rajanish Kakade)

Shahid Jamil, a virologist, said the recent local and state elections with massive political rallies and a major Hindu festival with hundreds of thousands of devotees bathing in the Ganges river in the northern city of Haridwar were super-spreader events.

India is ramping up its vaccination drive. The Health Ministry said the total vaccinations crossed 114 million with more than 3 million doses administered on Wednesday.

Hospitals in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and several others state were overwhelmed with patients with several hospitals reporting shortage of oxygen cylinders.

Cremation and burial grounds in the worst-hit area also were finding it difficult to cope with the increasing number of bodies arriving for last rites, Indian media reports said.

Imran Sheikh, a resident of the western city of Pune, said hospital authorities asked him to arrange for an oxygen gas cylinder for his relative undergoing COVID-19 treatment.



Security personnel guard near Gateway of India monument in Mumbai, India, Wednesday April 14, 2021. The teeming metropolis of Mumbai and other parts of Maharashtra, the Indian state worst hit by the pandemic, face stricter

restrictions for 15 days starting Wednesday in an effort to stem the surge of coronavirus infections. (AP Photo/Rajanish Kakade)



A security person patrols at the Marine Drive in Mumbai, India, Wednesday April 14, 2021. The teeming metropolis of Mumbai and other parts of Maharashtra, the Indian state worst hit by the pandemic, face stricter restrictions for 15 days starting Wednesday in an effort to stem the surge of coronavirus infections. (AP Photo/Rajanish Kakade)



Deserted road outside Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj train Terminus after restrictions were imposed in Mumbai, India, Wednesday April 14, 2021. The teeming metropolis of Mumbai and other parts of Maharashtra, the Indian state worst hit by the pandemic, face stricter restrictions for 15 days starting Wednesday in an effort to stem the surge of coronavirus infections. (AP Photo/Rajanish Kakade)



Muslims offer prayers and break fast on the first day of the holy month of Ramadan at the Jama Mosque, in New Delhi, India, Wednesday, April 14, 2021. Due to the COVID-19 situation only a handful of people turned up. Muslims across the world are observing the holy fasting month of Ramadan, where they refrain from eating, drinking and smoking from dawn to dusk. (AP Photo/Manish Swarup)

New Delhi and dozens of other cities and towns imposed night curfews as they battled an infection rate that almost doubled within 11 days.

When infections began plummeting in India in September, many concluded the worst had passed. Masks and social distancing were abandoned. When cases began rising again in February, authorities were left scrambling.

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Citation: With 200,000 in 1 day, India skyrockets past 14M virus cases (2021, April 15) retrieved 24 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-04-day-india-skyrockets-14m-virus.html>

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