

# India hits another grim virus record as oxygen demand jumps

May 6 2021, by Ashok Sharma

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Family members of COVID-19 victims leave as their funeral pyres burn at an open crematorium set up at a granite quarry on the outskirts of Bengaluru, India, Wednesday, May 5, 2021. (AP Photo/Aijaz Rahi)

Infections in India hit another grim daily record on Thursday as demand for medical oxygen jumped sevenfold and the government denied

reports that it was slow in distributing life-saving supplies from abroad.

The number of new confirmed cases breached 400,000 for the second time since the devastating surge began last month. The 412,262 new cases pushed India's official tally to more than 21 million. The Health Ministry also reported 3,980 deaths in the last 24 hours, bringing the total to 230,168. Experts believe both figures are an undercount.

Eleven COVID-19 patients died when pressure in an [oxygen](#) line dropped suddenly in a government medical college hospital in Chengalpet in southern India on Wednesday night, possibly because of a faulty valve, The Times of India newspaper reported.

Hospital authorities said they repaired the pipeline last week, but the consumption of oxygen had doubled since then, the newspaper said.

Demand for hospital oxygen has increased sevenfold since last month, a [government official](#) said, as India scrambles to set up large oxygen plants and transport oxygen. India created a sea bridge on Tuesday to ferry oxygen tankers from Bahrain and Kuwait in the Persian Gulf, officials said.

Most hospitals in India aren't equipped with independent plants that generate oxygen directly for patients, As a result, hospitals typically rely on liquid oxygen, which can be stored in cylinders and transported in tankers. But amid the surge, supplies in hard-hit places such as New Delhi are running critically short.



Workers arrive with a container of fuel as funeral pyres of COVID-19 victims burn at an open crematorium set up at a granite quarry on the outskirts of Bengaluru, India, Wednesday, May 5, 2021. (AP Photo/Aijaz Rahi)

Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said India has enough liquid oxygen but it's facing capacity constraints in moving it. Most oxygen is produced in the eastern parts of India while the demand has risen in northern and western parts.

K. Vijay Raghvan, a principal scientific adviser to the government, said this phase of the pandemic was "a very critical time for the country."

The United States, Britain, Germany and several other nations are rushing therapeutics, rapid virus tests and oxygen, along with materials

needed to boost domestic production of COVID-19 vaccines to ease pressure on the fragile health infrastructure.

India's [vaccine](#) production is expected to get a boost with the United States supporting a waiver of intellectual property protections for COVID-19 vaccines.

Vaccine components from the U.S. that have arrived in India will enable the manufacturing of 20 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, said Daniel B. Smith, the senior diplomat at the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi.



Street dogs sleep at a market as shops remain closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic in Dharamshala, India, Wednesday, May 5, 2021. India's government is facing calls for a strict lockdown to slow a devastating surge in coronavirus infections. (AP Photo/Ashwini Bhatia)



Family members wait to cremate body of a COVID-19 victim at an open crematorium set up at a granite quarry on the outskirts of Bengaluru, India, Wednesday, May 5, 2021. (AP Photo/Aijaz Rahi)



A worker sprinkles fuel on burning funeral pyres of COVID-19 victims at an open crematorium set up at a granite quarry on the outskirts of Bengaluru, India, Wednesday, May 5, 2021. (AP Photo/Aijaz Rahi)



Homeless people queue up for free food being distributed by a charity in view of the COVID-19 pandemic in Hyderabad, India, Thursday, May 6, 2021. (AP Photo/Mahesh Kumar A.)



An Indian health worker checks body temperature of a vegetable vendor during a door-to-door survey being conducted as a precaution against COVID-19 in Hyderabad, India, Thursday, May 6, 2021. (AP Photo/Mahesh Kumar A.)





An Indian health worker checks body temperature of a woman during a door-to-door survey being conducted as a precaution against COVID-19 in Hyderabad, India, Thursday, May 6, 2021. (AP Photo/Mahesh Kumar A.)

Last month, Adar Poonawalla, chief executive officer of the Serum Institute of India, the world's biggest vaccine maker, appealed to President Joe Biden to lift the embargo on U.S. export of raw materials, which he said was affecting its production of COVID-19 shots.

The government meanwhile described as "totally misleading" Indian media reports that it took seven days to come up with a procedure for distributing urgent medical supplies that started arriving on April 25.

The statement sad a streamlined and systematic mechanism for

allocation of the supplies received by India has been put in place for effective distribution. The Indian Red Cross Society is involved in distributing supplies from abroad, it said.

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