

Russia sets new record for COVID deaths as Australia locks down cities

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Russia on Tuesday reported its highest daily coronavirus death toll and Australia locked down major cities as the highly infectious Delta strain has caused mayhem around the world.

Fears grew over [major sporting events](#) like Euro 2020 and the Olympic

Games, even as an AFP tally showed the world passed the milestone of over three billion COVID-19 vaccines administered.

At least 3.9 million people have died from COVID-19 and the pattern of vaccinations globally is highly uneven.

According to the AFP count, [high-income countries](#) as defined by the World Bank have administered an average of 79 doses per 100 inhabitants.

But in low-income nations, the figure is just one shot per 100 people.

"The world is failing," warned WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

"We are facing a two-track pandemic, fuelled by inequity," the World Health Organization chief said Tuesday.

The WHO said it was supporting the five remaining countries yet to start their COVID-19 immunisation campaigns: Burundi, Eritrea, Haiti, North Korea and Tanzania.

Russia reported 652 coronavirus fatalities over the past 24 hours, with a record-high number of daily deaths—119—in Saint Petersburg, which is due to host a Euro 2020 quarter final on Friday

Health Minister Mikhail Murashko said 151,000 people in Russia are currently in hospital with the coronavirus.

In further bad news, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov admitted that Moscow's goal of vaccinating 60 percent of the population by the end of summer was unattainable.

Russia has also introduced mandatory shots for some groups of citizens to counter scepticism.

Meanwhile, foreign ministers from the Group of 20 major economies stressed the need for greater global cooperation.

"Multilateral cooperation will be key to our collective ability to stop this global health crisis," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi did not name the United States but suggested ulterior motives in the rhetoric as he called on the G20 to show "true multilateralism".

"China calls on able countries to avoid export restrictions or excessive hoarding" of vaccines, Wang said.

Western leaders have pledged to donate one billion doses to poorer countries.

Australia locks down

In Australia, public anger is growing at the slow pace of vaccinations.

The Delta variant has pushed Sydney, Perth, Darwin and Brisbane into lockdown, meaning a total of more than 10 million Australians are confined at home.

But so far, less than five percent of adults are believed to have received both vaccine doses.

Brisbane resident Nicola Hungerford, 57, said she expected lockdowns to keep happening "until the government gets their bloody act together" on the vaccine rollout.

"It shows how little respect they have for people," she told AFP.

Human tragedies

The speed of transmission of the Delta variant has fuelled concerns over ongoing or upcoming sporting events.

Germany urged the British government to reduce the number of fans allowed into Wembley stadium for the final Euro 2020 matches.

"I think it's irresponsible for tens of thousands to gather in close proximity" in countries where the Delta variant is spreading, Interior Minister Horst Seehofer told Germany's Augsburg Allgemeine newspaper.

UEFA and the British authorities allowed 45,000 fans to attend a game between England and Germany on Tuesday, or about 50 percent of capacity.

Attendance will be increased to more than 60,000 for the semi-finals and final at Wembley.

The Delta variant was first identified in India, which suffered a vicious wave of coronavirus that overwhelmed hospitals and crematoriums at its height in April and May.

Now, bodies buried hastily along the banks of the Ganges river by families who could not afford funeral pyres have started to re-emerge as flooding dislodges them.

"It was really sad to see poor people burying their loved ones in an undignified manner, but the rising water level has made it worse," Sonu Chandel, a boatman, told AFP.

India authorised the emergency use of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine on Tuesday as it seeks to ramp up inoculations.

It is the fourth to be approved by New Delhi after Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield, Covaxin—developed by Indian firm Bharat Biotech—and Russia's Sputnik V.

The United Arab Emirates, which has mounted an intensive vaccination campaign that has produced some of the highest inoculation rates globally, announced curbs on unvaccinated people in Abu Dhabi.

The Gulf state's capital will allow only vaccinated people in many public places, including schools, malls and restaurants, from August 20.

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