Medical Xpress

Iran hits new COVID infection record for 2nd straight day

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A man wearing protective face mask to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus walks past an advertisement of skin care products in southern Tehran, Iran, Tuesday, July 20, 2021. Iran on Tuesday broke another record in the country's daily new coronavirus cases, even as Tehran and its surroundings went into lockdown, a week-long measure imposed amid another surge in the pandemic. Credit: AP Photo/Vahid Salemi

Iran recorded over 34,900 new coronavirus infections on Tuesday, setting the nation's single-day record for cases as vaccinations lag, public complacency deepens and the country's outbreak spirals further out of control.

The previous record of 31,814 infections had been set only a day earlier, providing a sense of how quickly Iran's latest surge, fueled by the contagious delta variant, is mounting. Health authorities recorded 357 COVID-19 fatalities on Tuesday, bringing the total death toll to 89,479—the highest in the Middle East.

The alarming spread of the variant prompted new anti-virus restrictions last week. The government ordered the closure of state offices, public places and non-essential businesses in the capital of Tehran. But as with previous government measures, the lockdown looked very little like a lockdown at all. Tehran's malls and markets were busy as usual and workers crowded offices and metro stations.

Iranian authorities have avoided imposing heavy-handed rules on a population that can little afford to bear them. The country, which has suffered the worst virus outbreak in the region, is reeling from a series of crises: tough U.S. sanctions, global isolation, a heat wave, the worst blackouts in recent memory and ongoing protests over water shortages in the southwest.

Now, health officials warn that hospitals in the capital are overwhelmed with breathless COVID patients too numerous to handle. Fewer than 3% of Iranians have been fully vaccinated in the sanctions-hit country. Many front-line medical workers have been vaccinated with Iran's locally produced shots or the Chinese state-backed Sinopharm vaccine that may be less effective than other inoculations.

Iran's government announced that its homemade vaccine provides 85%

protection from the coronavirus, without disclosing data or details. Iran also imports Russia's Sputnik V vaccine, as well as the Oxford-AstraZeneca shot through the United Nations-backed COVAX program.

In Libya, meanwhile, authorities imposed a nightly curfew in parts of the country, including the capital of Tripoli, amid a spike in coronavirus cases and concerns about the highly infectious delta variant.

The 12-hour curfew takes effect starting Tuesday, the government said. All businesses, cafes, restaurants, and parks are required to close during the curfew.

The number of new cases in Libya has risen more than six times since July 1, according to daily figures from Libya's National Center for Disease Control. On Tuesday, the center reported 3,348 confirmed new cases and 24 deaths.

Libya has recorded more than 240,300 cases so far in the pandemic, including 3,422 deaths. The actual figures are believed to be much higher, given the scarcity of testing and the depletion of the country's health care system after almost a decade of civil war.