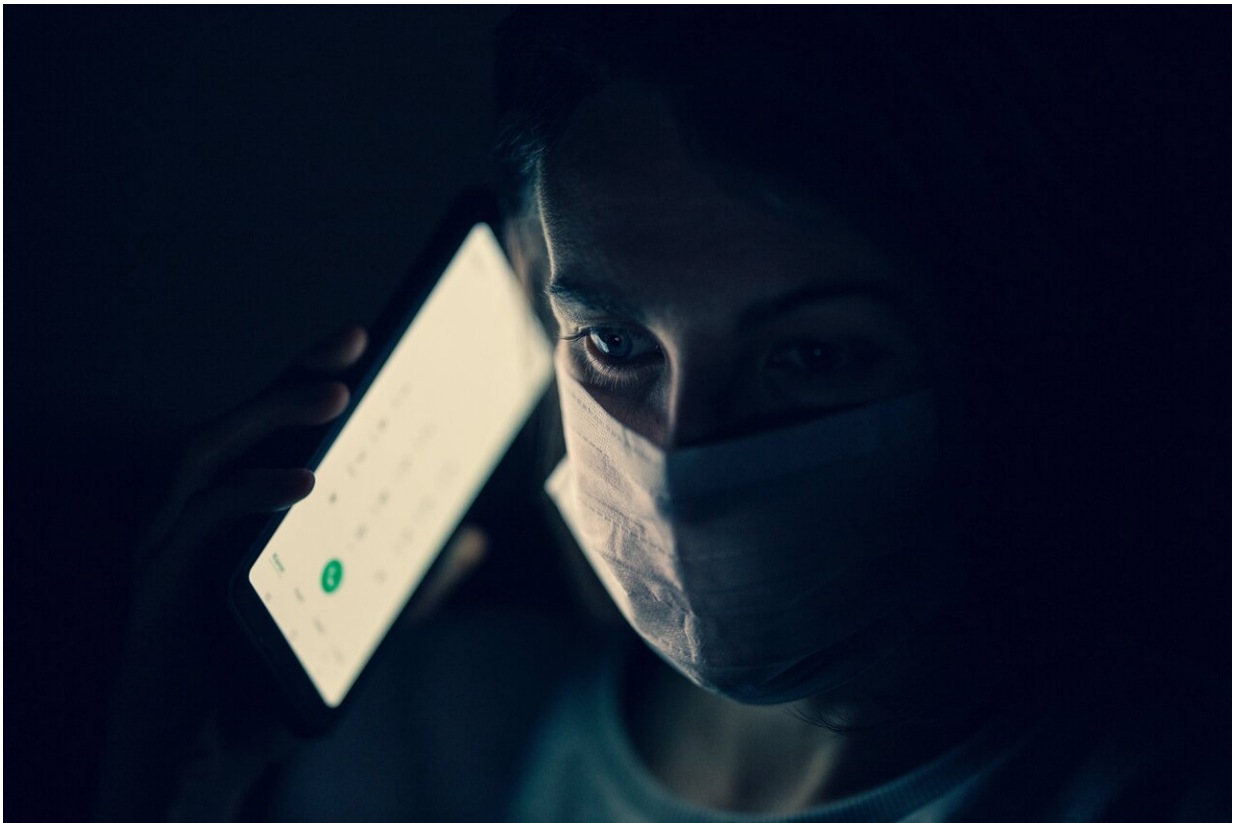


Tunisia virus situation catastrophic: health ministry

July 8 2021



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Tunisia's health system has "collapsed" under the weight of the COVID-19 pandemic, the health ministry spokeswoman said on Thursday, describing the virus's affect on the country as "catastrophic".

On Tuesday alone, Tunisia recorded 9,823 cases and 134 deaths, its worst daily toll from the virus.

Hospitals in the north African country have seen a significant influx of patients over the past two weeks.

The country of approximately 12 million inhabitants has suffered nearly 465,000 cases and 15,735 deaths.

"The current health situation is catastrophic," spokeswoman Nissaf Ben Alya said, in an interview with a local radio station.

"The number of cases has risen dramatically. Unfortunately, the health system has collapsed," she said.

Ben Alya said hospitals are overwhelmed, and it is difficult to find available beds and oxygen supplies.

"The health situation will get worse if efforts are not united," she added.

Some bodies of COVID victims have been left lying in rooms next to other patients for up to 24 hours, because there were not enough staff to organise their transfer to overstretched mortuaries.

The health ministry's Facebook page said special field hospitals set up in recent months are no longer enough.

The government of war-torn neighbouring Libya said Thursday it had decided to close the countries' shared border and suspend air links with Tunisia for a week, in response to the coronavirus situation and the health ministry's announcement.

Since June 20, authorities have imposed a total lockdown on six regions

across Tunisia, including Kairouan, as the number of COVID cases spiralled.

The capital Tunis has been placed under partial lockdown since last week, with weekend lockdowns from July 10 to prevent crowding at beaches.

On Thursday authorities extended those measures until the end of the month, and banned all travel between regions.

Across Tunisia, only four percent of the population have received the full two doses of vaccine.

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Citation: Tunisia virus situation catastrophic: health ministry (2021, July 8) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-07-tunisia-virus-situation-catastrophic-health.html>

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