

World races to contain Delta variant, US steps up anti-virus plan

July 30 2021, by Susan Stumme, With Afp Bureaus



Face masks are reappearing in cities around the world as the Delta variant fuels a surge in coronavirus cases.

Governments around the world on Thursday raced to head off a surge in coronavirus cases driven by the Delta variant, with US President Joe

Biden offering new incentives to vaccine holdouts and Israel authorizing booster shots.

The World Health Organization warned the highly transmissible strain of the virus, first detected in India, could unleash a "fourth wave" of cases in its Eastern Mediterranean zone—an area stretching from Morocco to Pakistan.

Those countries are especially at risk because vaccination rates are low—only 5.5 percent of the region's population has been fully vaccinated. So in nations where vaccines are more available, [public officials](#) are sounding the alarm.

"People are dying—and will die—who don't have to die," Biden said in a speech on his administration's new initiatives aimed at curbing the spread. "If you're out there and unvaccinated, you don't have to die."

He said all federal government workers would be asked to reveal their vaccination status—and those without the jab would have to mask in the workplace and submit to COVID-19 tests.

The Democratic president also said he would ask the Pentagon to consider making the coronavirus vaccine mandatory for active duty military personnel, and asked state and [local governments](#) to offer \$100 to holdouts who get the shot.



US President Joe Biden speaks about Covid-19 vaccinations at the White House.

"If incentives help us beat this virus, I believe we should use them. We all benefit if we can get more people vaccinated," Biden said.

In Israel, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett announced that those over the age of 60 would be offered a third dose of vaccine—a booster shot available from Sunday.

"I call on all elderly people who have already been vaccinated to receive this additional dose," Bennett said. "Protect yourselves."

"The decision was based on considerable research and analysis, as well as

the rise in risk of the Delta variant wave," Bennett said.

Israel quickly rolled out its vaccination campaign and had dropped many restrictions on public gatherings in June, but infections soared, and masks are once again mandatory in enclosed [public places](#).

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has also urged people living in COVID hotspots—even the vaccinated—to mask up indoors.



In Israel, where this woman is being tested for Covid-19, the government has authorized booster shots for those over the age of 60.

The surge in cases across America has left the early vaccine adopters angry at those who have so far opted against the jab.

"It's almost like they don't care about the rest of the world. They're being selfish and self-centered," Alethea Reed, a 58-year-old health care administrator in Washington, told AFP.

Mixed bag of measures

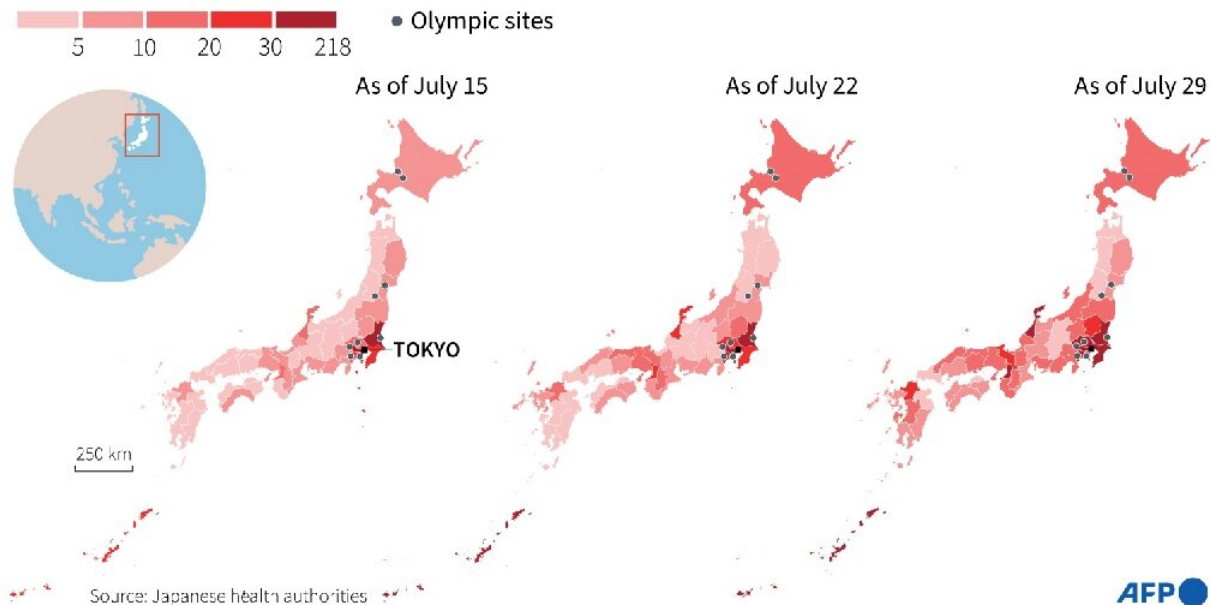
The global coronavirus situation is a mixed one: while some places like the French territory of La Reunion and Spain's Catalonia region are instituting new curbs, others are easing up on restrictions.

Portugal said it would lift its anti-virus measures in several phases from Sunday, with shops and restaurants allowed to open for longer hours and working from home no longer compulsory.

But at the Summer Olympics in Tokyo, already delayed by a year due to the pandemic, the virus continued to wreak havoc, with nearly 200 infections among the athletes, media and employees taking part in the Games.

Olympics: the progression of Covid-19 in Japan

Change in the number of new cases over 7 days per 100,000 population by prefecture in the host country of the Olympics



Maps showing the change in the number of new cases in the prefectures of Japan, host country of the Olympic Games.

Among them were US pole vault hopeful Sam Kendricks, a two-time world champion, and two high-profile golfers: world number one Jon Rahm and 2020 US Open champion Bryson DeChambeau.

Japan hit a new record for the number of daily cases—more than 10,000—on Thursday, and a state of emergency already in place in Tokyo was to be extended to four more regions.

"The current situation is the worst ever," a top government advisor on the virus, Shigeru Omi, warned, according to national broadcaster NHK.

In Mexico, the national statistics institute said more than 200,000 deaths

from the coronavirus were recorded in 2020—35 percent more than originally reported by the government

And in China, where the novel coronavirus first emerged in the city of Wuhan, small outbreaks driven by the Delta variant were reported in three provinces.

China is racing to vaccinate at least 65 percent of its 1.4-billion population by the end of the year.

So far, the virus has killed more than 4.1 million people around the world, according to an AFP tally compiled from official sources. The United States has the highest death toll, at more than 612,000.

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