

# Hotels become hospitals as Cuba battles soaring COVID cases

August 4 2021, by Andrea Rodriguez

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People wearing masks as a precaution amid the new coronavirus pandemic speak on the street as they wait to enter a COVID-19 vaccination center set up inside a cultural center in Havana, Cuba, Monday, Aug. 2, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa

Cuba's hot spot for COVID-19 infections has shifted to the central province of Ciego de Avila, where officials are converting hotels into

hospitals.

Instead of tourists, the Hotel Ciego de Avila will hold up to 240 low-risk pediatric patients, officials say, while the Las Canas Motel will have 53 beds for [pregnant women](#) with the coronavirus.

They are also ordering isolation of whole households when a virus is detected.

"The people are very frightened. Every day, more sick, more deaths—a relative, a neighbor, a friend," said Mayi Del Valle, a 49-year-old library worker from the town of Ceballos in the [province](#), speaking by phone Wednesday. "There are people treating COVID in their houses based on herbs."

Cuba's national director of epidemiology, Francisco Durán, said Wednesday that the province accounted for 23 of the 98 new deaths from COVID-19 recorded the previous day in the country of 11 million people—the nation's highest [death](#) toll yet in the pandemic.

The province of some 430,000 people had about twice as many deaths as in the capital of Havana, a city of 2 million.

The west-central province of Matanzas, famed for the beach resort Varadero, was the center of infection last month, but the wave there seems to have receded.



Nurses attend people who will be given a shot of the Cuban Abdala vaccine for COVID-19 at a cultural center being used as a vaccination center during the new coronavirus pandemic in Havana, Cuba, Monday, Aug. 2, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa

Deputy Prime Minister Jorge Luis Tapia and Health Minister José Ángel Portales were sent to Ciego de Avila, about 400 kilometers (240 miles) east of Havana, and government news media said officials were sending more ambulances and 100 bicitaxis, which can be used for logistical support.

Since the start of the pandemic, Cuba has recorded 3,091 deaths and 422,614 confirmed infections, a huge share of them just in recent weeks. The country had been highly successful in keeping the virus at bay last

year, but cases began shooting up after a brief period of relaxed controls at the start of 2021.

The Pan American Health Organization also expressed concern Wednesday about rising infections in Cuba.

"This is due to the delta variant, which has been reported by authorities in various places in the country," said **Ciro Ugarte**, director of health emergencies for the organization, during a news conference in Washington.

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