

WHO 'deeply concerned' by Brazil COVID surge

March 12 2021



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The World Health Organization voiced deep concern Friday about Brazil's COVID-19 situation, urging "serious measures" to rein in surging numbers of cases and deaths, and relieve its overburdened health

system.

"We are deeply concerned," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a news briefing, pointing out that "not just the number of cases, but the number of deaths is also increasing".

"The measures that should be taken should be as serious as possible."

His comments came after Brazil earlier this week registered a grim new record of more than 2,000 COVID-19 deaths in 24 hours.

"Unless serious measures are taken, the upward trend, which is now flooding the [health](#) system and which is becoming beyond its capacity, will result in more deaths," Tedros warned.

The WHO has repeatedly voiced alarm about the outbreak in Brazil, which is the second hardest-hit country in the world after the United States, counting nearly 273,000 deaths out of close to 22.3 million cases.

Tedros warned Friday that the dire situation in Brazil risked causing a deterioration elsewhere.

"If the situation in Brazil continues to be serious like this, then the neighbouring countries will be affected... It could go even beyond."

Tedros also called for "clear messages from the authorities" on the situation and the measures needed, perhaps in veiled criticism of the country's far-right President Jair Bolsonaro's hands-off handling of the health crisis.

The president, who flouts expert advice on fighting the [coronavirus](#) despite having contracted it himself last year, last week urged Brazilians to "stop whining" about COVID-19 and renewed his attacks on stay-at-

home measures.

Health experts say the surge in Brazil is being fuelled by new, more contagious variants of the virus, including one known as P1 which is believed to have emerged in Brazil, in or around the Amazon rainforest city of Manaus.

Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO's technical lead on COVID-19, told Friday's briefing that studies showed the variant had a number of mutations that "confer increased transmissibility."

"There are some suggestions of increased severity as well," she said.

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Citation: WHO 'deeply concerned' by Brazil COVID surge (2021, March 12) retrieved 20 September 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-03-deeply-brazil-covid-surge.html>

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