

Number of COVID-19 cases hits 4 million worldwide

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On December 31, 2019, Wuhan's Health Commission notified the World Health Organization (WHO) Country Office of cases of pneumonia-like illness of unknown etiology. At the time, there were forty-one cases, of which 11 were severely ill. The next day the WHO requested additional information from the Chinese authorities to determine the risk of community transmission.

On January 7, Chinese authorities identified the pathogen causing these illnesses as a novel coronavirus, implying that the virus had a pandemic potential because no one on the planet would have immunity to it. A few days later, the genomic sequence for the virus was uploaded into the GenBank sequence database and shared with the world. On January 11, Xinhua News Agency reported the death of an ailing elderly man with health issues who succumbed to complications from the infection. Since then, over the four months that have passed, more than 4 million people across the globe have become infected, and 275,000 have perished.

Though the pandemic has impacted 212 countries and territories, the real brunt of the health crisis hit the European countries and the United States hardest. Adequately forewarned but least prepared, they squandered the weeks after the declaration of an international emergency by the WHO in late January. The initial months of the epidemic in China now seem to pale in comparison when in late February to mid-March, the virus began to take its toll rapidly.

According to the website Our World in Data, Belgium has had 726 deaths per million; Spain has had 558; Italy has reported 495; the United Kingdom, 451; France, 398; the Netherlands, 309; Sweden, 301; and the United States, 229. China, by comparison, has suffered little more than three deaths per million.

Yet by all accounts, these fatality reports are

underestimations. As health care systems in these countries reached near-collapse, the necessary accounting for cases lagged or cases were completely missed. Many people were turned away from hospitals only to perish at home, infecting those who cared for them and fueling the transmission of the pandemic deeper into communities. The *Financial Times*, based on its analysis of overall fatalities and excess deaths, placed the toll from COVID-19 60 percent higher than official counts.

Presently, the seven-day rolling average of new deaths stands at 1,723 average daily deaths for the United States and 568 average daily deaths for the United Kingdom. These curves show plateauing or downturning. This is true for Italy, Spain and France as well, though all three nations still have deaths over 100 per day. Countries with worrisome trends include Brazil, with trends approaching 500 deaths per day, with a doubling time of about seven days. Canada is closing on 200 deaths per day as it continues to climb steadily. Russia's death toll is demonstrating a rising trajectory. However, its absolute numbers are still quite low in comparison to its daily case rate, which is now second only to the United States. Russia has exceeded the US in per capita testing.

India, Peru and Ecuador are also seeing daily new cases and fatalities climb. Yet they have some of the lowest testing per capita. Ecuador reports small numbers of daily deaths, but its reports appear to be gross underestimations. According to the *Financial Times*, with only 245 official COVID-19-related deaths in Guayas Province published between March 1 and April 15, there were 10,200 excess deaths during this period compared to previous years—a more than 350 percent increase.

Upper-middle and high-income nations have had a

disproportionate share of cases and deaths. However, this is a byproduct of how the virus was transmitted across the globe through commercial air traffic directly to cities in these countries. Phylogenetic studies have intricately traced the spread of the virus to major cities in Europe and the United States. Within these high-income countries, the poorest living in heavily populated metropolitan areas and dense urban centers suffer the highest case fatalities. Presently, New York City, Chicago and Los Angeles remain vectors for the pandemic in the United States.

As the WHO has repeatedly noted, the pandemic is in its early stages. As the major cities in the imperialist centers are bringing the epidemic under some measure of control, the pandemic is beginning to move to other regions. These include Eastern Europe, the Indian subcontinent, the Americas and Africa. These regions have the lowest income per capita. Without a robust testing capacity, they could soon be in a similar predicament as Europe and the US, with the virus silently rampaging through communities. The economic toll from the massive contraction of global markets will be hardest felt in the regions that lack the financial resources to meet basic medical needs and have the worst social infrastructure.

In the early part of April, Oxfam published a report warning that the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic could very well push half a billion more people into poverty unless urgent action was taken by the rich nations to “bail out” developing countries. More than three billion people are living in poverty, and 25 percent of the globe suffers from food insecurity. “But for poor people in emerging countries who are already struggling to survive, there are almost no safety nets to stop them from falling into poverty,” the charity wrote.

These warnings will fall on the deaf ears of the financial oligarchs. Despite record job losses in the US, where data released Friday shows 20.5 million jobs lost in April and almost 15 percent of the labor force unemployed, the Dow climbed 455.43 points to close at 24,331.32.

As Kristina Hooper, chief global market strategist at Invesco, said, “Stocks have decoupled from the economy.” The *Financial Times* highlights the “swift actions from the Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank and the Bank of Japan,” which continue to bail

out the markets and commit to buying “an unlimited quantity of government securities.” The central banks and national governments are working in concert with the states to force workers back to their place of employment regardless of the risk posed. This will ignite new waves of the pandemic, as evidenced by developments in meatpacking plants.

Africa remains, by comparison, less affected by the pandemic. With 58,361 cases across the continent and only 2,140 deaths, Africa saw only 57 new fatalities yesterday, predominately in Egypt and South Africa. However, a study by the WHO Regional Office for Africa projected that if containment measures fail, 83,000 to 190,000 people could perish and 29 million to 44 million could be infected in the first year of the pandemic.

The lower fatality and infection rates in the WHO estimates take account of unique social and environmental factors in Africa slowing transmission. The lower rates of transmission also mean there will be a prolonged outbreak that may last years, remaining as a smoldering hotspot for future regional and worldwide outbreaks. The number of people afflicted by the infection would certainly strain and likely overwhelm the health care capacities of these nations.



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