

Mass reopenings worldwide have accelerated the coronavirus pandemic

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The mass economic re-openings in the Americas, Europe and Asia that began in May have paved the way for a massive spread of the coronavirus pandemic internationally. According to data aggregated by Worldometer, the average number of new cases has been more than 115,000 since May 27, a number which has been steadily rising since May 12.

The accelerating spread is also reflected in the number of new deaths each day. Starting in April, the number of new deaths had begun to decrease, a result of the physical distancing taken up by hundreds of millions of workers, toilers and youth around the world. The rate of new deaths, however, has now stabilized at an average of 3,770, as those people have been steadily forced back to work, and it is poised to climb in the wake of the hundreds of thousands of new infections.

As of this writing, there have been nearly 6.7 million officially confirmed cases and more than 390,000 deaths caused by COVID-19 worldwide. A plurality of cases are in the US and Brazil, which have totals of 1.9 million and 610,000 cases, respectively, along with 110,000 and 33,000 deaths.

The governments of both countries have also whipped workers back into factories and plants under threat of economic destitution if they don't return. In Brazil, meatpacking plants were opened on May 20, while auto production started resuming the previous week. Hundreds of workers in these facilities have already become infected, spreading it to their homes and their communities. Despite this, President Jair Bolsonaro is storming ahead with the full reopening of the country, overseen by local mayors and regional governors.

Factories in the United States began opening even earlier. Some states, including Oklahoma, North Dakota and Nebraska, never had stay-at-home orders,

while states such as Georgia began reopening the last week of April. Certain industries, such as auto, waited until the second or third week in May to fully resume manufacturing their products, but these were only shut down in the first place as a result of wildcat strikes that erupted in mid-March, after reports emerged of infections spreading in the auto plants.

The spread is in every state. While states such as New York, New Jersey, New Mexico and Connecticut report a 14-day decrease in the number of new daily cases, nearly half of states have an increase in new cases, particularly in areas where the pandemic did not initially widely infect the population. Florida, for example, yesterday saw its highest new case count yet, bringing its total of cases above 60,000. The state's death toll stands at more than 2,600.

Mexico has also emerged as a new hotspot for outbreaks of the pandemic. It is now on par with the United States and Brazil for the number of new deaths each day, and is the fourteenth country to exceed 100,000 cases and the seventh to breach 10,000 deaths. Hundreds of these were caused by the premature reopening of the country's maquiladora sweatshops, which are used by US auto and other manufacturing companies to produce cheap parts.

Similarly in India, large sections of industry were ordered to resume production in mid-May, particularly parts and car companies. Even then, the number of cases in the country was still increasing, largely a result of the haphazard lockdown implemented by the Modi government in April that trapped millions of migrant workers in the already crowded and unsanitary slums of Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad and other cities. The Modi government's actions have caused India's official case and death counts to soar. They currently stand at 226,000 and 6,309, respectively, and are

increasing exponentially.

The outbreaks in these countries and many others underscore the warnings that have been repeatedly issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) against reopening without having a system of mass testing, contact tracing and isolation in place to fight the coronavirus. Hans Kluge, the European director for the WHO, recently noted, “The second wave is not inevitable. But an increasing number of nations are lifting restrictions, and there is a definite threat of a repeat outbreak of the COVID-19 infection. If those outbreaks are not isolated, a second wave may come and it may be very destructive.”

Even this statement is behind the times. The first wave of the pandemic, in global terms, never actually abated and is now cutting a bloody swathe through some of the poorest regions of the world. South Asia, as well as Africa, have been devastated not only by the coronavirus, but also by powerful typhoons and massive locust swarms.

Kluge also noted, “We still have neither a vaccine nor a cure for COVID-19.” Similar statements were issued on Wednesday by Anthony Fauci, the director the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases in the US. He warned that, while it is possible that there will be a vaccine available sometime next year, there is no evidence that any immunity will last.

“When you look at the history of coronaviruses, the common coronaviruses that cause the common cold, the reports in the literature are that the durability of immunity that’s protective ranges from three to six months to almost always less than a year,” Fauci said during an interview with *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) Editor Howard Bauchner. “That’s not a lot of durability and protection.”

The re-openings are also occurring alongside the mass protests in the US and internationally against the police murder of George Floyd and the dictatorial actions taken by President Donald Trump. While many protesters are wearing masks in an attempt to protect themselves from the disease, the large crowds, chanting and holding hands are ideal for the contagion to rapidly spread. George Floyd himself was infected when he was killed, his autopsy showed.

The protests are also becoming an excuse for areas to close testing sites in California, Florida, Illinois, Pennsylvania and elsewhere. Testing for the disease is a

crucial step in containing outbreaks and is the only way to objectively know how far the pandemic has spread.

Less testing also artificially deflates the case counts, which can in turn be utilized to justify further reopenings. In a story virtually ignored by the national media, the worker who developed Florida’s coronavirus database was fired last month for refusing to manipulate the data in order make it seem as though the state had reached the threshold to safely reopen. As testing becomes less common, it becomes easier for false data to be presented as legitimate.



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