

# Pandemic surpasses 10 million COVID-19 cases and over 500,000 deaths globally

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Over the weekend, the number of COVID-19 cases surpassed the 10 million mark as the pandemic accelerated throughout North and South America, the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East and South Africa. As of this writing, the Worldometer coronavirus tracker had logged 10,196,711 cases.

In another grim milestone, the number of global deaths due to COVID-19 rose above 500,000, standing at 503,149. The number of serious and critical cases has also begun to climb again.

On Saturday, the United States posted a one-day high of 47,341 new COVID-19 cases, fueled by the reckless and premature “reopening” of the country. Brazil also posted another massive one-day total of 46,907 COVID-19 cases, pushing the global number of new cases close to 200,000. In addition, the number of fatalities internationally has been slowly climbing since May 27.

By all accounts, most European countries have been faring better on the basis of a more measured lifting of lockdowns, having turned case numbers down sharply and reduced fatalities to the single digits, with the exception of the United Kingdom and Russia, which posted 100 and 188 deaths yesterday, respectively.

However, on June 25, Hans Henri Kluge, the World Health Organization regional director for Europe, reported that Europe had seen an increase in weekly cases for the first time in months. “Thirty countries and territories have seen increases in new cumulative cases over the past two weeks,” he said. “In 11 of these, accelerated transmission has led to a very significant resurgence that, if unchecked, will push health systems to the brink once again in Europe.”

South America, with 2.1 million cases, recorded 52,943 new COVID-19 cases and 2,664 deaths. Brazil continues to remain the epicenter of the pandemic, with 35,887 new cases yesterday and 994 fatalities.

Presently, only hospital patients can be tested there, making its per capita testing abysmally low. At a health ministry briefing this weekend, officials indicated that plans were being worked out to acquire 46.5 million tests by the

end of the year. In only two weeks, COVID-19 cases have soared from 867,000 to 1,344,000, an increase of nearly one-half million.

With its high crude case fatality rate of 12.4 percent, Mexico’s cases continue to accelerate, and deaths continue to climb. There are now over 213,000 cases and more than 26,000 deaths.

Epidemiologists in Mexico City, the epicenter of the outbreak in Mexico, noted that in late April the virus spread quickly through the stalls of Central de Abasto, where 350,000 people come daily to shop, browse or eat. The market, the size of over 600 football fields, employing over 90,000 people, cannot be closed because it provides the majority of fresh food to the city of 22 million people, according to the *Wall Street Journal*. Mexico City, with the support of the city’s mayor, has taken aggressive steps to test, isolate and trace contacts.

However, the success with the market has not been emulated in the rest of the country, where President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has ruled out an aggressive public health initiative and instead allowed businesses to reopen. Like Trump and Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, he has chosen to downplay the dangers posed by the virus and refused to wear a mask in public. Plans are underway for López Obrador to travel in early July to meet Trump in Washington to launch the new United States-Mexico-Canada free trade agreement.

The official response to the pandemic in the United States, spearheaded by Trump but supported in all essentials by the Democrats, has produced a catastrophe. With 2,631,758 total cases and 128,412 deaths, the curve of daily cases is worse than in late March and early April, and now the pandemic has expanded across a far broader geographic area.

Only two states reported declines this weekend: Connecticut and Rhode Island. Thirty-six states are seeing cases climb.

By all accounts, Florida is the new epicenter in the US, with 9,585 cases recorded on Saturday, a one-day high. Arizona, Texas, Georgia, California, Louisiana and South

Carolina all posted more than 1,000 COVID-19 cases. Arizona's intensive care units (ICUs) are at capacity as accounts by health providers suggest the infrastructure is reaching a breaking point.

One Arizona nurse posted on Facebook: "I don't think there's a shift where people don't die. It's horrible. The nurses are just numb from it. I've never seen so many people die." Other posts indicate that hospitals are building out extensions to their ICUs by moving patients into the postoperative recovery or telemetry floors. Staff and material shortages abound.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, a Trump insider, is facing accusations that his administration is "cooking the books" to hide the true scope of the outbreak in the state. "That data is clearly indicating we have a problem," said Dr. Mary Jo Trepka, professor and chair of the department of epidemiology at Florida International University's Robert Stempel College of Public Health. "Testing data, symptom data, hospitalization data, it's all been clearly going up."

Houston hospitals have reported that their base ICU capacity has been reached for the first time since the pandemic began. Though several hospital CEOs have urged calm, they sent a letter to Houstonians on Wednesday warning that "if this trend continues, our hospital system capacity will become overwhelmed." As of Friday, the Houston region had 37,173 cases. Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo, who is self-quarantining after exposure to a person with COVID-19, is urging Governor Greg Abbott to issue a new stay-at-home order.

On Friday, Vice President Mike Pence and the White House Coronavirus Task Force held their first press briefing in two months. Pence praised Trump's response to the pandemic and provided a surreal depiction of a country making remarkable progress in combatting the virus, having "flattened the curve." He simply ignored the fact that the US was breaking records for new cases on a near daily basis and that in a range of states the average daily increase in infections had risen by as much as 80 or 90 percent over the numbers just two weeks ago.

In response to a reporter's admonition that the administration had defied health officials' recommendations and placed the lives of people in danger by holding political rallies, he said, "I want to remind you that the freedom of speech and the right to assemble peaceably is enshrined in the Constitution of the United States. Even in a health crisis, the American people don't forfeit their rights."

This is, as the saying goes, pretty rich coming from the second-highest official in an administration that less than a month ago sought to unleash the US military to crush peaceful protests against police brutality and impose martial law and continues to threaten such actions.

On Sunday, during an interview on the "Face the Nation" program, Pence continued his glowing assessment, declaring, "The American people should know that because of the leadership that President Trump has provided, because of the extraordinary innovation that we have brought to this task, we are in a much better place to respond to these outbreaks than we were four months ago."

Just minutes before Pence's interview was broadcast, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, speaking on CNN, warned that the "window is closing" for the US to get the pandemic under control. However, he placed the blame for the health disaster on the American people, who were failing to heed social distancing guidelines. He ignored the fact that reckless and disturbing behavior by sections of the population was being cheered on by the president.

Outside of lambasting President Trump, the Democrats' response to the pandemic has carefully avoided any criticism of the back-to-work drive itself, which they support. They have, moreover, been largely silent on the massive numbers of workers being infected at meatpacking plants, Amazon distribution centers, auto plants, transit barns, hospitals, nursing homes and other workplaces where no serious measures have been taken to protect them from the virus.

Former Vice President Joe Biden, the Democratic presidential candidate, gave a speech last week in Lancaster, Pennsylvania in which he focused on the Trump administration's filing of a suit with the US Supreme Court to abolish Obamacare. He said nothing about the back-to-work drive or the bailout of Wall Street and advanced no policies to halt the pandemic or address the social catastrophe resulting from the loss of some 45 million jobs.

Interviewed Sunday on ABC's "This Week" program, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi began her remarks by hailing the reopening of "our economy," while criticizing Trump for failing to provide sufficient testing for the virus.



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