

Coronavirus cases, deaths soar in Mexico and across Latin America

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Mexico has now surpassed Italy in its number of known COVID-19 deaths, which currently stand at just over 35,000, making the country's pandemic outbreak the fourth deadliest in the world after the United States, Brazil and the United Kingdom. Mexico now also reports just under 300,000 total coronavirus cases, and its pandemic curve mirrors those across Central and South America, a region which accounts for about a quarter of all cases and deaths internationally.

To cope with its surging case rate and death toll, Mexico City Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum has announced that any household with one confirmed case of the virus will be required to stay home for at least 15 days, with the government providing food and supplies. The city has also been forced to enforce laws limiting the length of time a body can be buried to allow the dead in public cemeteries to be exhumed, making space for those who died from the pandemic. Older bodies are being cremated and replaced with a new one.

In contrast to the dire situation across the country, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) claimed Sunday, "The bottom line is that the pandemic is on the downside, that it is losing intensity." His remarks, which echo the numerous falsehoods uttered by US President Donald Trump about the pandemic, are an attempt to justify the economic reopening his administration has spearheaded even as the actual case and death numbers have continued to increase.

AMLO's pandemic policies have been criticized by former health officials. Salomón Chertorivski, who served as health minister from 2011–2012, argued against reopening the economy before cases and deaths were steadily decreasing. "There are three fundamental variables: a reduction in the last 14 days in the numbers of contagions, reduction in recent days in the number of

deaths, and reduction in the number of hospitalized people," Chertorivski told the Mexican newspaper *Reforma*. "None of those three parameters were achieved."

Worldwide, the number of coronavirus cases reported to public health authorities has doubled in the past six weeks, bringing the total number to 13.2 million. One million of these were reported in the past five days alone. During those same five days, another 23,000 people died from COVID-19, bringing the confirmed death toll above 574,000.

As has been noted by the World Health Organization, mortality from the infection is relatively stable but threatening to rise. The 7-day moving average of daily world deaths is now just below 5,000, higher than records since May 13. At yesterday's press briefing WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that "there is a lot to be concerned about."

Dr. Tedros was also more blunt than usual in his contrast of the countries which were "alert and aware" of the dangers of the pandemic, those which "are opening up their societies on a data-driven, step-by-step basis, with a comprehensive public health approach" and countries which are "seeing dangerous increases in cases, and hospital wards filling up again" because "proven measures to reduce risk" were "not implemented or followed."

While WHO officials rarely name names, these last comments are clearly aimed at countries including Mexico, Brazil and the United States. Dr. Tedros noted, "The epicenter of the virus remains in the Americas, where more than 50% of the world's cases have been recorded." This could not have been said even two months ago, when Mexico reported only 40,000 cases, about thirteen percent of its current case count. They

are among the “many countries ... headed in the wrong direction.”

Mexico, along with Brazil, Colombia, Argentina and Bolivia, are in what Dr. Tedros called the “intense transmission phase of their outbreak.” Brazil has just under 1.9 million cases and nearly 73,000 deaths, values which have doubled over the past month. Colombia is worse off, having doubled its cases and deaths to 318,000 and 5,400, respectively, in the past two and a half weeks. Bolivia and Argentina have had similarly sharp increases in their outbreaks.

These countries also provide insight into the seeming contradiction that, globally, cases are increasing while deaths have remained relatively constant.

The pandemic is also spreading rapidly in many Central American and Caribbean countries. Panama, for example, has more cases per capita than the United States, at 45,633, along with 909 deaths. The Dominican Republic has recorded more than 45,000 cases and 903 deaths, doubled from a month ago. Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, targets of US imperialism for decades, have collectively suffered more than 67,000 cases and 2,200 deaths.

Moreover, these are countries with very little testing, meaning that the true extent and toll of the pandemic is likely vastly undercounted. In Guatemala, 46 percent of tests have come back positive, indicating that the country’s outbreak is spiraling out of control and that spread of the disease is not really known. In Mexico, there are reports of families not getting sick loved ones tested because the procedure has been generally to cremate those who have died from the pandemic, rather than bury them.

At yesterday’s WHO press briefing, Dr. Michael Ryan gave a sobering assessment of the state of the pandemic. “I’ve said here before, we need to learn to live with the virus. Expecting we will eradicate this virus in the coming months is unrealistic.”

He also warned about being optimistic about developing a vaccine in lieu of basic public health measures. “Believing that magically we will get a perfect vaccine that everyone will have access to is also not realistic. The history of vaccines are that we can and will develop a vaccine. The question is how effective will that vaccine be, and more important and more worryingly: who will get that vaccine and will that distribution be fair and equitable.”



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