

New coronavirus cases globally rocket past a quarter million

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A record 279,769 new cases of COVID-19 were reported yesterday, bringing the total number of known cases globally to nearly 15.4 million. There were also 7,113 confirmed deaths, a fatality count not seen since April, bringing the number of confirmed deaths caused by the coronavirus to 629,343.

Brazil, India, South Africa and the United States accounted for the vast majority of the new cases, with Brazil and the United States accounting for almost half by themselves. Similarly, the deaths in Brazil, India, Mexico and the US made up more than half of yesterday's confirmed coronavirus fatalities. Twenty other countries recorded more than 1,000 new cases of the virus yesterday, and eleven posted more than 50 new deaths.

India posted a record day of both new cases, at 45,599, and new deaths, at 1,120, and the rate of increase of both indicates that the pandemic is continuing to spiral out of control in the world's second most populous country. Its total case count and death tally stand at 1.24 million and 29,890, respectively. Brazil reported the most deaths of any country yesterday, at 1,293, bringing its number of dead to nearly 83,000. The largest economy in Latin America also saw another 65,000 infections, a new daily record, sending its current case count above 2.2 million.

South Africa also suffered a record number of new deaths, 572, double the previous record, bringing the total to 5,940, and a near record of new cases, 13,150, bringing confirmed infections to just under 395,000. As the country was recording these grim figures, the South African newspaper the *Sowetan* noted that the number of excess deaths in the country from natural causes had rose to 17,090 from May 6–July 14, four times the official COVID-19 death toll over the same period.

This suggests that the pandemic has claimed, directly or indirectly, more than 23,000 human lives in the country.

Nearly 7,000 new cases were recorded in Mexico, a figure which has been steadily climbing over the past month and a half from less than 3,200 per day at the beginning of June. During that same period, deaths have increased from an average of more than 350 per day to now more than 580 a day. The country currently has more than 362,000 known cases, ranking seventh in the world, and 41,190 reported deaths. At this rate, Mexico is on track to exceed the number of deaths in the United Kingdom (currently at 45,501) by the end of the month.

There was also a resurgence of new deaths in the United States, which rose to 1,205, the highest number since May 30. The number of new cases also jumped back up to just under 72,000. The spread of the pandemic in the US continues to be driven by hot spots such as California (12,137 new cases; 156 new deaths), Texas (10,528; 202), Florida (9,785; 140) and Georgia (3,314; 81). Eleven states have more than 100,000 confirmed cases, and Louisiana is on track to become the twelfth tomorrow. In addition, California is slated to overtake New York as the state with the highest number of cases this week, while the case counts in Florida and Texas will likely exceed those in New York by the end of the month.

Amid the spiraling death toll of the pandemic globally, US President Donald Trump appeared in press briefings on Tuesday and Wednesday, the first time he has personally been at a coronavirus-related White House press conference since April.

Both had similar themes, with Trump almost immediately calling the pandemic by the xenophobic term "China virus," especially inflammatory given the

rising tensions currently being instigated by the US in the South China Sea. He also boasted that the federal government had cut a deal with Pfizer to produce 100 million doses of the vaccine it is developing with a further order of 500 million later on, without knowing whether or not the vaccine will be effective or safe.

Trump also doubled down on his administration's calls for sending children back to schools as the pandemic spirals out of control. He made explicit that, "Our strategy is to shelter the highest risk Americans while allowing younger and healthier citizens to return to work or school." He based this on the claim that, "The median age of those who succumb to the China virus is 78 years old. Roughly half of all deaths have been individuals in nursing homes or long term care. In one study, 90 percent of those hospitalized had underlying medical conditions."

He then asserted, "99.96 percent of deaths aren't children," hoping to gloss over the fact that, whether or not such a figure is even correct, it would mean that 58 children have already died from the disease with school closed. At the same time, he warned, correctly for once, "It will ... get worse before it gets better."

While Trump may dismiss the sickness in young people as "mild," if he has his way, by September, tens of millions of children will be back in school, and many will be infected with coronavirus and will have caught it from or passed it on to their teachers, school staff, bus drivers, parents and elderly family members. Given the course of the virus, by October, the number of sick and dead will begin to sharply rise. By November, for every 10 million kids forced to go back to school under such unsafe conditions, 4,000 will be dead, their families mourning the loss of the next generation even as they themselves cope with contracting the disease.

Conversely, it suggests that tens of thousands—perhaps millions—of toddlers and teenagers will be forced to witness the slow, agonizing deaths of the mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles or grandparents because they inadvertently brought the virus home.

Trump also took the opportunity to denigrate the youth who participated in the demonstrations against police violence in the aftermath of the police murder of George Floyd. He claimed, "Cases started to rise among young Americans shortly after demonstrations ... which presumably triggered a broader relaxation of mitigation efforts nationwide and a substantial increase

in travel."

This is in fact not true. While health experts were worried of a sharp rise in cases as young people across the country braved the pandemic, as well as waves of police brutality, to protest against state repression, that spike in cases never materialized. Instead, the rise in cases has been attributed to the reopening of the economy, particularly in crowded factories and plants, without having a robust testing and contact tracing plan in place.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, spoke to this in an interview with CNN's Jake Tapper on Tuesday. Fauci called the US network of testing and contact tracing "patchy." He further noted, "One of the things that is an issue ... is the time frame from when you get a test to the time you get a result back is sometimes measured in a few days. If that's the case, it kind of negates the purpose of the contact tracing. Because if you don't know if that person gets their results back early, ... when you get to six or seven days, that kind of really mitigates getting a good tracing and good isolation."



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