News



Migrant workers who have yet been unable to return to their home states in north India sit wearing masks at a town square during lockdown in Kochi, In the southern Indian state of Kerala, Tuesday, May 19, 2020. The number of coronavirus cases in India has surged past 100,000, with most of the cases being in major cities. But rural villages across India are also seeing an increase in cases with the return of hundreds of thousands of migrant workers who left cities and towns where they were abandoned by their employers after having toiled for years building homes and roads. (AP/R S Iyer)

Vladimir Isachenkov

View Author Profile

Elena Becatoros

View Author Profile

Nick Perry

View Author Profile

The Associated Press

View Author Profile

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Coronavirus cases are spiking from India to South Africa and Mexico in a clear indication the pandemic is far from over, while Russia and Brazil now sit behind only the United States in the number of reported infections.

The surges come as much of Asia, Europe and scores of U.S. states have been easing lockdowns to restart their economies as new infections wane. U.S. autoworkers, French teachers and Thai mall workers are among hundreds of thousands of employees back at work with new safety precautions.

Russia reported a steady rise in new infections May 19, and new hot spots have emerged across the nation of about 147 million. Russia registered nearly 9,300 new cases in the last 24 hours, bringing the total to almost 300,000 infections, about half of them in Moscow. Authorities say over 2,800 people with COVID-19 have died in Russia, a figure some say is surely higher.

Some experts argue Russian authorities have been listing chronic illnesses as the cause of death for many who tested positive for the virus. Officials angrily deny manipulating statistics, saying Russia's low death toll reflects early preventive measures and broad screening. Nearly 7.4 million tests have been conducted.

In Russia's second-largest city of St. Petersburg, a virus hot spot, all burials now must be with closed coffins as a precaution, irrespective of the cause of death. Previously the measure applied only to COVID-19 deaths.

Russia's caseload is second only to that of the U.S., which has seen 1.5 million infections and over 90,000 deaths. The country's prime minister, Mikhail Mishustin, resumed work May 19 after a bout of coronavirus.

Cases are still rising across Africa, where all 54 nations have seen confirmed infections for a total of over 88,000 cases and 2,800 deaths, according to the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

South Africa has the highest number of cases at over 16,400 and nearly 290 deaths. Infections have increased dramatically in Cape Town and the surrounding Western Cape province, which now accounts for 61% of South Africa's total.

Latin America has seen more than 480,000 confirmed coronavirus cases and about 31,000 dead. The highest number of cases is in Brazil, which became the world's third worst-hit county May 18 with more than 250,000 infections despite limited testing. Hospital officials reported that more than 85% of intensive care beds are occupied in the states of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo.

Some countries have seen encouraging signs reverse: Iran reported a steady drop in new infections through April, only to see them rise again in May.

But there is new hope after an experimental vaccine against the coronavirus yielded encouraging results, though in a small and extremely early test. Stocks rallied May 18 on the news.

In a surprise announcement, President Donald Trump said he has been taking the malaria drug hydroxychloroquine to protect against the virus even though scientists say there is no evidence of its effectiveness against the disease and his own administration has warned it should be administered only in a hospital or research setting because of potentially fatal side effects.



An employee of the Federal State Center for Special Risk Rescue Operations of Russia Emergency Situations disinfects a hall of Leningradsky railway station in Moscow, Russia, Tuesday, May 19, 2020. Russia has continued to see a steady rise of new infections, and new hot spots have emerged across the vast country of 147-million people that ranks the second in the world behind the United States in the number of coronavirus cases. (AP/Pavel Golovkin)

In Russia, President Vladimir Putin has declared that a partial economic shutdown imposed in late March helped slow the outbreak and prevented the nation's health care system from being overwhelmed. A week ago, he ended the nationwide lockdown.

He has given Russia's 85 regions a free hand to determine how they will ease their own lockdowns, but some have been struggling. The mostly Muslim southern province of Dagestan has reported a spike in infections that left its hospitals overflowing.

In India, coronavirus cases surged past 100,000, and infections are rising in the home states of migrant workers who fled cities and towns during a nationwide lockdown when they lost their jobs.

India is now seeing more than 4,000 new cases daily. States including West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha and Gujarat, the major contributors of India's migrant labor, are showing major spikes in infections as the country's lockdown rules have eased. More than 3,100 with COVID-19 have died, according to India's Health Ministry.

And in densely populated Bangladesh, where authorities reported a record number of new positive tests at over 1,600, thousands of cars were on the streets of the capital, Dhaka, despite a lockdown. Authorities have relaxed some rules and allowed shops to open ahead of the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr.

In Latin America, intensive care units in the Chilean capital of Santiago have been beyond 90% capacity for days, and officials warned that intensive care staff members are reaching their limits.

"They can't keep going forever, no matter how many beds or ventilators there are,'' said Claudio Castillo, a professor of public policy and health at the University of Santiago.

Infections are also increasing in poor areas of Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina, where authorities relaxed strict lockdown measures last week, allowing some businesses to open and children to walk outside on weekends.

Colombia struggled with an outbreak in Leticia, a city on the border with Brazil, where hospitals were overwhelmed and patients were being sent to commandeered hotels. Colombia has recorded about 16,300 confirmed cases and close to 600 dead.

In Europe and in the United States, which has seen 36 million Americans file for unemployment, economic concerns dominated the political landscape.

Unemployment claims in Britain jumped 69% in April, the government reported May 19. European car sales collapsed by an unprecedented 76% last month.

An experimental vaccine by Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Moderna Inc. triggered hoped-for immune responses in eight healthy, middle-aged volunteers. They were found to have antibodies similar to those seen in people who have recovered from COVID-19.

Much bigger studies on the vaccine's safety and effectiveness are planned. Worldwide, about a dozen vaccine candidates are in or near the first stages of testing.

More than 4.8 million people worldwide have been infected and over 318,000 deaths have been recorded, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University that experts believe is too low for several reasons.

[Becatoros reported from Athens, Greece and Perry from Wellington, New Zealand. Associated Press writers around the world contributed.]

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