

Coronavirus

'A hot mess'

Americans face testing delays as virus surges

AUSTIN, Texas, July 9, (AP): With a cough and shortness of breath, it took Austin, Texas, resident Sam Lee three tries to get a COVID-19 test.

The first time, he showed up an hour before the public testing site was set to close and was told they had reached capacity. He was turned away from a second center when rain shut it down, and voluntarily left a third after someone ahead of him said they had been waiting in line for more than three hours.

"If you have symptoms and you are just driving around the city trying to figure out how you can get a test, for people who are positive, it is not ideal," said Lee, who finally got a test on June 29 after he showed up at a site before dawn and waited for more than two hours. Another five days passed before he was able to view the results online, and he didn't receive a text with the results until seven days after being tested.

Four months, 3 million confirmed infections and over 130,000 deaths into the coronavirus outbreak in the US, Americans confronted with a resurgence of the scourge are facing long lines at testing sites in the summer heat or are getting turned away. Others are going a week or more without receiving a diagnosis.

Some sites are running out of kits, while labs are reporting shortages of materials and workers to process the swabs.

Some frustrated Americans are left to wonder why the US can't seem to get its act together, especially after it was given fair warning as the virus wreaked havoc in China and then Italy, Spain and New York.

"It's a hot mess," said 47-year-old Jennifer Hudson of Tucson, Arizona. "The fact that we're relying on companies and we don't have a national response to this, it's ridiculous. ... It's keeping people who need tests from getting tests."

Appointment

It took Hudson five days to make an appointment through a CVS pharmacy near her home. She booked a drive-up test over the weekend, more than a week after her symptoms - fatigue, shortness of breath, headache and sore throat - first emerged. The clinic informed her that her results would probably be delayed.

Testing has been ramped up nationwide, reaching about 640,000 tests per day on average, up from around 518,000 two weeks ago, according to an Associated Press analysis. Newly confirmed infections per day in the US are running at over 50,000, breaking records at practically every turn.

More testing tends to lead to more cases found. But in an alarming indicator, the percentage of tests coming back positive for the virus is on the rise across nearly the entire country, hitting almost 27% in Arizona, 19% in Florida and 17% in South Carolina.

While the US has conducted more tests than any other nation, it ranks in the middle of the pack in testing per capita, behind Russia, Spain and Australia, according to Johns Hopkins University.

"I am stunned that as a nation, six months into this pandemic, we still can't figure out how to deliver testing to the American people when they need it," said Dr Ashish Jha, director of Harvard's Global Health Institute. "It is an abject failure of leadership and shows that the federal government has not prioritized testing in a way that will allow us to get through this pandemic."

Testing alone without adequate contact tracing and quarantine measures won't control the spread of the scourge, according to health experts. But they say delays in testing can lead to more infections by leaving people in the dark as to whether they need to isolate themselves.

In other developments:

While the number of confirmed cases in the US hit 3 million Wednesday by Johns Hopkins' count, health officials have said that because of inadequate testing and the many mild infections that have gone unreported, the real number is about 10 times higher, or almost 10% of the US population.

A crowd of thousands attending President Donald Trump's campaign rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in late June, along with large groups of people who showed up to protest, "likely contributed" to a dramatic surge in new coronavirus cases in the area, Tulsa City-County Health Department Director Dr Bruce Dart said Wednesday. Tulsa County reported 261 confirmed cases on Monday, a new record one-day high, and another 206 confirmed cases on Tuesday. A spokesman for the Trump campaign didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Most New York City students will return to school in the fall two or three days a week and learn online the rest of the time under a plan announced by Mayor Bill de Blasio. He said schools can't accommodate all their students at any one time and maintain social distancing. The school system in New York is the biggest in the nation, with 1.1 million students. It has been closed since March.

Capacity

In New York City, the most lethal hot spot in the nation during the spring, testing was scarce early on but is now widely available. As many as 35,000 tests are conducted daily through a combination of private health organizations and city agencies, according to the city Health Department.

"Widespread testing holds the key to reopening our city safely," de Blasio said.

The US Department of Health and Human Services this week said it will open free "surge testing" sites in three hard-hit cities: Jacksonville, Florida; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Edinburg, Texas. The sites will be able to conduct as many as 5,000 tests a day in each city, with results in three to five days, officials said.

In Georgia, one of the states where cases are surging, officials are rushing to expand testing capacity as demand threatens to overwhelm six major sites around Atlanta, said DeKalb County CEO Michael Thurmond.

"If you project this out over the next three weeks, we can't handle it," he said.

In New Orleans, people were turned away from a free testing site for a third consecutive day after it reached its daily allotment of tests. Health care providers are running low on trays and chemicals needed to run machines used in the tests.

Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego called the situation there "desperate" as residents have sat in sun-baked cars for up to 13 hours to get drive-thru testing. Robert Fenton, head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, said FEMA is doubling the testing supplies it plans to ship to Arizona.

Patrick Friday, a United Methodist minister in Alabama, went to several hospitals and clinics in Birmingham this week to get checked after his school-age son tested positive. But he was told that unless he had a preexisting condition, he didn't qualify.

Finally, he ended up at a site offering rapid-result tests and his negative result came back quickly.

"We are several months into this," he said. "How can it be that we can't go in and get a test?"



De Blasio



Dr Rhea Reyes wears a personal protective suit, double masks, face shield, lab gown and gloves to prevent the spread of COVID-19 as she performs a dental procedure on her patient who is also required to wear a protective suit at a clinic in metropolitan Manila, Philippines on July 6. Dentists have set up strict preventive health protocols inside their clinics as they are allowed to operate again after months of closure while the government slowly eases the lockdown in the country. (AP)

Is it safe to visit the dentist during the pandemic?

Is it safe to visit the dentist during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Dentists can't eliminate all risk, but they are taking steps to minimize the chances of spreading the coronavirus.

You'll likely notice changes as soon as you enter the office. Many dentists have removed magazines from waiting rooms, for example, as well as some chairs to encourage social distancing. They also are spacing out appointments to avoid crowding their offices.

You may be asked to arrive for your appointment

with a facial covering and to wait in your car until equipment is cleaned and the dentist is ready. Before receiving care, you can also expect staff to take your temperature and ask about COVID-19 symptoms.

Procedures are changing, too. Coronavirus is spread mainly through droplets people spray when they talk, cough or sneeze. Dental care requires close quarters and procedures that can generate a spray of saliva and water. To reduce risk, dentists are returning to manual tools for procedures like teeth cleanings, instead of other instru-

ments that may do the job faster but create more of that spray.

Staff also have started wearing masks, face shields and other personal protective equipment. Some dentists are charging for all the extra gear, so ask in advance if you should expect extra costs.

As the pandemic spread earlier this year, dental offices in the US mostly closed, except for emergency care. By the end of June, nearly all offices had reopened, according to surveys by the American Dental Association. (AP)



A Tokyo Metro worker, wearing goggles and protective mask, sprays chemicals to make anti-virus coating inside a passenger car at its depot on July 9 in Tokyo. The subway company plans to disinfect all 2,720 cars by mid August this year. Kyodo News reported. Japan lifted a seven-week pandemic state emergency in late May, and social and business activity have since largely resumed. (AP)



Xi

Merkel

Health

Germany records 442 cases: German health authorities announced 442 new coronavirus cases and 12 additional deaths on Thursday.

The new cases raised the total cases to 197,783 and deaths to 9,048, according to Robert Koch institute for infectious diseases. Germany's Chancellor is Angela Merkel.

It added that all cities and regions in Germany's 16 states moved out of the danger zone and are shown in green on the pandemic's map. (KUNA)

50 cases in SKorea: South Korea reported 50 new cases of the coronavirus on Thursday, raising the country's total caseload to 13,293, said Yonhap News Agency.

The death toll increased by two to 287, the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said.

The country newly identified 22 more imported cases, posting double-digit numbers for 14 consecutive days.

Sporadic cluster infections across the nation also continued to rise.

With religious gatherings-tied cases on a steady rise, the government plans to ban churches nationwide from organizing gatherings other than regular worship services, effective from Friday. (KUNA)

China reports 9 cases: China, on Thursday, reported nine new coronavirus (COVID-19) in the last 24 hours. No deaths were announced. China's President is Xi Jinping.

The National Health Commission was quoted by the Xinhua news agency as saying that the tally of deaths and infections were 4,634 and 83,581 respectively.

The tally of recoveries hit 78,590 with the discharge of 42 people within the last 24 hours, revealed the commission. There are 357 people receiving treatment. (KUNA)

87 infections in Belgium: Total

Coronavirus

3 nations account for over 60 pct of new cases

Virus cases jump in worst-hit countries

WELLINGTON, New Zealand, July 9, (AP): India on Thursday reported nearly 25,000 new coronavirus infections, as the disease continued its ominous spread through the nation of nearly 1.4 billion people.

The virus is showing no signs of slowing in the worst-affected countries: the United States, Brazil and India. The three nations are accounting for more than 60% of new cases, according to recent tallies from Johns Hopkins University.

The US reported nearly 59,000 new daily cases, just short of the record 60,000 cases set a day earlier, as President Donald Trump insisted that schools reopen in the fall. Brazil reported nearly 45,000 new cases.

The virus has also been spreading rapidly in South Africa, which reported nearly 9,000 new cases in its latest daily update. A provincial health official said 1.5 million grave sites are being prepared and it's the public's responsibility "to make sure that we don't get there."

In Australia, which had initial success containing the outbreak, authorities on Thursday reported 179 new cases, most of them in the city of Melbourne, where authorities are battling a resurgence and have imposed a new six-week lockdown.

Victoria state Chief Health Officer Brett Sutton said six new cases were from a Melbourne high school which has become the state's largest known cluster, with 113 people infected. More than 2,000 students and hundreds of staff are in quarantine.

Tokyo confirmed more than 220 new cases Thursday, exceeding its record daily increase from mid-April

and prompting concerns of widening of the infections. Tokyo's more than 7,000 cases are about one-third of the nation's total.

Experts on Tokyo's virus task force said the majority of recent cases were linked to night clubs but rising infections from households, workplaces and parties raised concerns the virus is spreading in the wider community.

In India, where the death toll has risen above 21,000, research by the Institute of Mathematical Sciences in Chennai shows that the reproduction rate of the virus ticked up in the first week of July to about 1.2 after it had steadily fallen from a peak of 1.8 in March.

The rate needs to be below one for new cases to start falling. Health experts say the true extent of the virus' spread in India is unknown and that the country must test more given its enormous population.

In the US, the number of confirmed cases has passed 3 million - meaning nearly one in every 100 people has been confirmed as infected - and the number of deaths is more than 132,000.

Guidelines

President Trump remains determined to reopen America's schools despite worries about the virus, and on Wednesday threatened to hold back federal money if school districts don't bring their students back in the fall. He complained that his own public health officials' safety guidelines are impractical and too expensive.

Despite Trump's pressure, New York City announced that most of its students would return to classrooms only two or three days a week and

would learn online in between.

"Most schools will not be able to have all their kids in school at the same time," said Mayor Bill de Blasio.

A growing chorus of public health experts are urging US officials to reconsider how they are reopening the broader economy, and to prioritize schools. That effort that will likely require closing some other establishments like bars and gyms to help curb the virus spread and give children the best shot at returning to classrooms.

"We need to think about what our priorities are as a society, and some other things may just have to wait," said Helen Jenkins, an infectious disease epidemiologist at Boston University. "I think there are hard choices having to be made by decision makers."

In Serbia, police fired tear gas to disperse rock-throwing protesters in the capital as violence erupted for a second day during demonstrations against the president's handling of the outbreak.

President Aleksandar Vucic backtracked on reinstating a lockdown in Belgrade this week, but demonstrations in front of parliament turned violent, with protesters firing flares and throwing stones while trying to storm the downtown parliament building.

A number of people were injured. Critics of the autocratic Vucic say his lifting of the previous lockdown measures contributed to the current surge in cases and was done for political reasons.

In Indonesia, the resort island of Bali reopened Thursday after a three-month virus lockdown, allowing local people and stranded foreign tourists to resume public activities before foreign arrivals resume in September.

infections of coronavirus cases in Belgium increased to 62,210, after 87 more cases were reported by Belgian health authorities on Thursday.

Two more deaths from coronavirus were reported increasing the death toll to 9,778, it added. (KUNA)

4 deaths in Mauritania: The Mauritanian Ministry of Health reported on Tuesday four more fatalities from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), which brought the death toll to 139.

In his daily presser, Director of the Ministry's Public Health Dept Ould Al-Zahhaf said that 63 people tested positive for illness over the past 24 hours, taking the

country's caseload to 5,087.

Meanwhile, 50 patients have been discharged from hospital, taking the overall recoveries to 1,994, he added. (KUNA)

14 deaths in Sudan: The Sudanese Ministry of Health said that 87 persons have tested positive for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and 14 others died from it in the past 24 hours.

The figures took the country's caseload to 10,084 and the death toll to 622, according to a statement from the ministry received by KUNA on Wednesday.

The overall number of recoveries rose to 5,074 as 40 former patients have tested negative. (KUNA)

15 fatalities in Italy: Italy, on Wednesday, recorded 15 COVID-19 deaths and 193 infections during the last 24 hours.

In its daily report, the Italian health ministry said that the virus death toll reached 34,914, while the total number of infections climbed to 242,149. (KUNA)

4 deaths in Spain: The novel coronavirus claimed four new lives and infected 383 people in Spain during the past 24 hours, the health ministry said in a statement on Wednesday. It put whole number of people who have been subjected to PCR tests at 252,513 and deaths' toll at 28,396.

Currently, there are up to 67 areas throughout Spain infested with the contagion. In Catalonia and Galitia, more than 270,000 people are quarantined and isolated due to robust spread of the pandemic in the two regions. (KUNA)



In this photo released by the Royal Thai Army, a health officer collects a nasal swab sample from Chief of Staff of the US Army Gen James McConville to test for the coronavirus at the military airport in Bangkok, Thailand on July 9. McConville will be the first official foreign guest to meet Thailand's Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha at the Government House since travel restrictions were eased for a select group of foreigners allowed to visit Thailand. (AP)