

## Health

## No more kidney dialysis?

## Severe shortages hit Lebanese hospitals

BEIRUT, June 12, (AP) Hospitals in Lebanon warned Thursday they may be forced to suspend kidney dialysis next week due to severe shortages in supplies, the latest in Lebanon's accelerating crises and collapsing health sector.

Lebanon is grappling with an unprecedented economic and financial crisis that has seen the local currency collapse and banks clamp down on withdrawals and money transfers. As the Central Bank's foreign currency reserves dry up, the country has been witnessing shortages in medicines, fuel and other basic goods, with long lines forming outside petrol stations.

The once-thriving health care system has been among the hardest hit, with some hospitals halting elective surgeries, laboratories running out of test kits and doctors warning in recent days that they may even run out of anesthesia for operations.

On Thursday, doctors said they may be forced to suspend kidney dialysis next, blaming shortages on a dispute between medical importers and the Central Bank over subsidies.

"It is a crime against humanity," said George Ghanem, chief medical officer at the Lebanese American University Medical Center - Rizk Hospital, reading a statement on behalf of the doctors.

"The hospitals and medical sector cannot continue this way. We are approaching very difficult days where we will no longer be able to receive patients," he added.

Ghanem appeal to the United Nations and the World Health Organization, urging them to step in by sending aid directly to hospitals or the Red Cross, bypassing the Lebanese government and Central Bank.

"Otherwise there are patients tomorrow who will not have their dialysis, patients who will not be diagnosed, and patients who will not be operated on," he said. Already, there were 350 brands of basic medications that were in short supply, he added.

The crisis in Lebanon, which is rooted in decades of corruption and mismanagement by an entrenched political class, has driven more than half of the population into poverty, caused the local currency to lose more than 85% of its value. The World Bank on Tuesday said Lebanon's crisis is one of the worst the world has seen in the past 150 years.

## Challenges

The crisis has worsened considerably because of politicians' inability to agree on a new government amid colossal challenges the country faces. The Cabinet of outgoing Prime Minister Hassan Diab resigned days after a massive explosion at Beirut's port last August, and the country has been without a fully functioning government since.

Locked in a power struggle, Lebanon's President Michel Aoun and prime minister-designate Saad Hariri continue to trade blame as the country sinks deeper into crises that every day become more intractable.

The meltdown, with no end in sight, poses the gravest threat to Lebanon's stability since the 1975-90 civil war.

"We are headed for a real catastrophe," said Hala Kilani, the doctor in charge of the dialysis department at the LAUMC-Rizk Hospital. She said medical teams were fighting each day to secure the necessary amounts of filters needed to continue with dialysis and blood tests for patients. Even finding needles to administer blood for dialysis patients, who are usually anemic, is a struggle.

"We have to call one million pharmacies just to find one or two needles," she told The Associated Press. "This is very dangerous."

Issam Yassin, a 40-year-old on dialysis, said he was at a loss for words. "It is very difficult and it will be a catastrophe if it continues."

"For us, if there is no dialysis there is no alternative," he said.

Kilani, the doctor, said the current situation was worse than during Lebanon's 1975-90 civil war.

"We have honestly never reached the situation we are in now," Kilani said. "If we cannot secure the supplies needed, the patients will die."



**AIDS:** The UN General Assembly overwhelmingly approved a declaration last Tuesday calling for urgent action to end AIDS by 2030, noting "with alarm" that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities and pushed access to AIDS medicines, treatments and diagnosis further off track.

The declaration commits the assembly's 193 member nations to implement the 18-page document, including reducing annual new HIV infections to under 370,000 and annual AIDS-related deaths to under 250,000 by 2025. It also calls for progress toward eliminating all forms of HIV-related stigma and discrimination and for urgent work toward an HIV vaccine and a cure for AIDS.

Without a huge increase in resources and coverage for those vulnerable and infected, "we will not end the AIDS epidemic by 2030," the assembly warned.

It said the coronavirus pandemic has created setbacks in combating AIDS, "widening fault lines within a deeply unequal world and exposing the dangers of under-investment in public health, health systems and other essential public services for all and pandemic preparedness."

While the international investment response to the pandemic is inadequate, it is nonetheless unprecedented, the assembly said.

The response to the coronavirus by many nations has demonstrated "the potential and urgency for greater investment" in responding to pandemics, underscoring "the imperative of increasing investments for public health systems, including responses to HIV and other diseases moving forward," it said.

The assembly adopted the resolution at the opening session of a three-day high-level meeting on AIDS by a vote of 165-4, with Russia, Belarus, Syria and Nicaragua voting "no."

Before the vote, the assembly overwhelmingly rejected three amendments proposed by Russia.

They would have eliminated references to human rights violations that perpetuate the global AIDS epidemic and a "rights-based" collaborative approach by UNAIDS, the U.N. agency leading the global effort to end the AIDS pandemic. They would also have dropped references to reforming discriminatory laws, including on the age of consent, on interventions to treat HIV among intravenous drug users including "opioid substitution therapy," and on "expanding harm reduction programs."

UNAIDS Executive Director Winnie Byanyima welcomed the declaration's adoption and told the assembly it "will be the basis of our work to end this pandemic that has ravaged communities for 40 years."

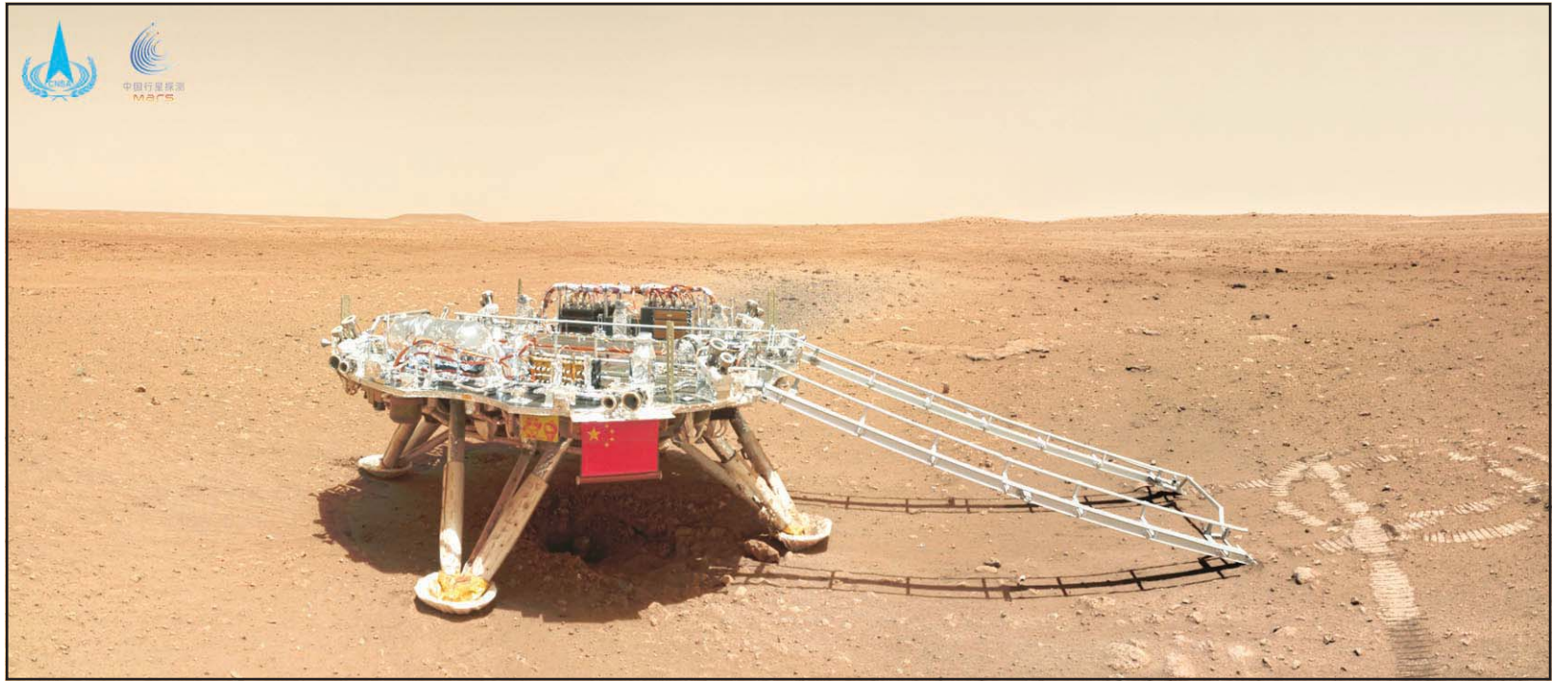
Calling AIDS "one of the deadliest pandemics of modern times," she said 77.5 million people have been infected with HIV since the first case was reported in 1981 and nearly 35 million have died from AIDS.

"HIV rates are not following the trajectory that we together promised," she said. "Indeed, amidst the fallout from the COVID crisis, we could even see a resurgent pandemic."

Byanyima said COVID-19 showed that science moves "at the speed of political will" and urged speeded up spending on innovations for AIDS treatment, prevention, care and vaccines "as global public goods."

On the plus side, the assembly's declaration said that since 2001 there has been a 54% reduction in AIDS-related deaths and a 37% reduction in HIV infections globally, but it warned that "overall progress has slowed dangerously since 2016."

The assembly expressed "deep concern" that in 2019 there were 1.7 million new infections compared to the 2020 global target of fewer than 500,000 infections and that new HIV infections have increased in at least 33 countries since 2016.



In this image released by the China National Space Administration (CNSA) on Friday, June 11, 2021, the landing platform with a Chinese national flag and outlines of the mascots for the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and Paralympics on Mars is seen from the rover Zhurong. China on Friday released a series of photos taken by its Zhurong rover on the surface of Mars, including one of the rover itself taken by a remote camera. (AP)



Stephanie Ward Littleton, Colo., jokes with reporters (not seen) after she was introduced as the state's second, \$1-million winner for being vaccinated against COVID-19 Friday, June 11, 2021, in Denver. The state is awarding five, \$1-million prizes to vaccinated residents in hopes of encouraging people to protect themselves from the spread of the coronavirus. (AP)

## Discovery

**Rover on Martian surface:** The dusty, rocky Martian surface and a Chinese rover and lander bearing small national flags were seen in photos released Friday that the rover took on the red planet.

The four pictures released by the China National Space Administration also show the upper stage of the Zhurong rover and the view from the rover before it rolled off its platform.

Zhurong placed a remote camera about 10 meters (33 feet) from the landing platform, then withdrew to take a group portrait, the CNSA said.

China landed the Tianwen-1 spacecraft carrying the rover on Mars last month after it spent about three months orbiting the red planet. China is the second country to land and operate a spacecraft on Mars, after the United States.

The orbiter and lander both display small Chinese flags and the lander has outlines of the mascots for the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and Paralympics.

The six-wheeled rover is surveying an area known as Utopia Planitia, especially searching for signs of water or ice that could lend clues as to whether Mars ever sustained life.

At 1.85 meters (6 feet) in height, Zhurong is significantly smaller than the US's Perseverance rover which is exploring the planet with a tiny helicopter. NASA expects its rover to collect its first sample in July for return to Earth as early as 2031.

In addition to the Mars mission, China's ambitious space program plans to send the first crew to its new space station next week. The three crew members plan to stay for three months on the Tianhe, or Heavenly Harmony, station, far exceeding the length of any previous Chinese mission. They will perform spacewalks, construction and maintenance work and carry out science experiments.

Subsequent launches are planned to expand the station, send up supplies and exchange crews. China has also brought back lunar samples, the first by any country's space program since the 1970s, landed a probe and rover on the moon's less explored far side. (AP)

**Robotic explorer on horizon:** Venus is hotter than ever, with a third new robotic explorer on the horizon.

A week after NASA announced two new missions to our closest neighbor, the European Space Agency said it will launch a Venus-orbiting spacecraft in the early 2030s. Named EnVision, the orbiter will attempt to explain why Venus is so "wildly different" from Earth, even though the two planets are similar in size and composition.

NASA will provide EnVision's radar. NASA's own pair of upcoming missions to our solar system's hottest planet - called DaVinci Plus and Veritas - will be the first for the US in more than 30 years. They'll blast off sometime around 2028 to 2030.

"It's a Venus hat trick!" tweeted NASA's top science chief, Thomas Zurbuchen.

The Europeans have visited more recently, with their Venus Express in action around the hothouse planet until 2014. Japan has had an orbiter around Venus since 2015 to study the climate.

It's a forbidding place: the thick carbon-dioxide atmosphere is home to sulfuric acid clouds.

"A new era in the exploration of our closest, yet wildly different, solar system neighbour awaits us," the European Space Agency's science director, Gunter Hasinger, said in a statement. (AP)

**Elephants on the move:** China's famed wandering elephants are on the move again, heading southwest while a male who broke from the herd is still keeping his distance.

The group left a wildlife reserve in the southwest of Yunnan province more than a year ago and has trekked 500 kilometers

## Coronavirus

## US to donate 500mn doses to help speed pandemic's end

## Biden lays out US vax donations

ST. IVES, England, June 12, (AP) President Joe Biden called on global leaders Thursday to join him in sharing coronavirus vaccines with struggling nations around the world after he promised the US would donate 500 million doses to help speed the pandemic's end and bolster the strategic position of the world's wealthiest democracies.

Speaking in England before the summit meeting of the Group of Seven, Biden announced the US commitment to vaccine sharing, which comes on top of 80 million doses he has already pledged by the end of the month. He argued it was in both America's interests and the world's to make vaccination widely and speedily available everywhere.

"We're going to help lead the world out of this pandemic working alongside our global partners," Biden said, announcing that on Friday the G-7 nations would join the US in outlining their vaccine donation commitments.

It's a remarkable turnaround of America's standing from a year ago, when the US was the deadliest hotspot of the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing the cancellation of the G-7 summit it was due to host. Now, the country is emerging as a model for how to successfully recover from more than 15 months of global crisis.

"In times of trouble, Americans reach out to offer help," Biden said, saying the US doses would "supercharge" the global vaccination campaign. "Our values call on us to do everything that we can to vaccinate the world against COVID-19."

He added the doses would be shared "with no strings attached" or "pressure for favors."

"We're doing this to save lives, to end this pandemic, and that's it," he said.

The US commitment is to buy and donate 500 million Pfizer doses for distribution through the global COVAX alliance to 92 lower-income countries and the African Union, bringing the first steady supply of mRNA vaccine to the countries that need it most. A price tag for the 500 million doses was not released, but the US is now set to be COVAX's largest vaccine donor in addition to its single largest funder with a \$4 billion commitment.

Biden had faced mounting pressure to outline its global vaccine sharing plan, especially as inequities in supply around the world have become more pronounced and the demand for shots in the US has dropped precipitously in recent weeks.

The global alliance has thus far distributed just 81 million doses and parts of the world, particularly in Africa, remain vaccine deserts. White House officials hope the ramped-up distribution program can be the latest example of a theme Biden plans to hit frequently during his week in Europe: that Western democracies, and not rising authoritarian states, can deliver the most good for the world.

White House officials said the 500 million vaccines will be shipped starting in August, with the goal of distributing 200 million by the end of the year. The remaining 300 million doses would be shipped in the first half of 2022.

"We're in this position because we've had so much success at home vaccinating Americans," White House press secretary Jen Psaki told CBS News on Thursday.

After leading the world in new cases and deaths over much of the last year, the rapid vaccination program in the US now positions it among the leaders of the global recovery. Nearly 64% of adults in the US have received at least one vaccine dose and the average numbers of new positive cases and deaths in the US are lower now than at any point since the earliest days of the pandemic.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development last week projected that the US economy would grow at a rate of 6.9% this year, making it one of the few nations for which forecasts are rosier now than before the

## US extends expiration dates for J&amp;J COVID vaccine by six weeks

WASHINGTON, June 12, (AP) Johnson & Johnson said Thursday that US regulators extended the expiration date on millions of doses of its COVID-19 vaccine by six weeks.

The company said a Food and Drug Administration review concluded the shots remain safe and effective for at least 4 1/2 months. In February, the FDA originally authorized J&J's vaccine for up to three months when stored at normal refrigeration levels.

Thursday's announcement comes after state officials warned that many doses in storage would expire before the end of the month. The change gives health providers more time to try and use remaining J&J shots sitting at pharmacies, hospitals and clinics. Many states have adopted a "first-in-first-out" approach to try and use their oldest vaccines first.

Vaccine expiration dates are based on information from drugmakers on how long the shots stay at the right strength. J&J said the FDA added six weeks based on data from ongoing studies assessing the vaccine's stability.

The FDA has been reviewing expiration dates on all three US authorized vaccines as companies have continued to test batches in the months since the shots first rolled out. Vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna, authorized in December, have a six-month shelf life.

The J&J extension will help maintain vaccine supplies even as the number of Americans getting shots has slipped. The country averaged about 800,000 new injections per day last week. That's down from a high of nearly 2 million daily shots two months ago. Government officials and companies have turned to incentives to encourages shots,

pandemic.

US officials hope the summit will conclude with a communique showing a commitment from the G-7 countries and nations invited to participate to do more to help vaccinate the world and support public health globally.

National security adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters Wednesday that G-7 leaders are "converging" around the idea that vaccine supply can be increased in several ways, including by countries sharing more of their own doses, helping to increase global manufacturing capacity and doing more across the "chain of custody" from when the vaccine is produced to when it is injected into someone in the developing world.

## Surplus

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson wrote in The Times of London newspaper that it was now time for wealthy countries to "shoulder their responsibilities" and "vaccinate the world," although his own country has yet to send any doses abroad or announce any solid plan to share vaccines. Johnson indicated Britain had millions of doses in surplus stocks.

Last week, the White House unveiled plans to donate an initial allotment of 25 million doses of surplus vaccine overseas, mostly through the United Nations-backed COVAX program, promising infusions for South and Central America, Asia, Africa and others.

Officials say a quarter of that excess will be kept in reserve for emergencies and for the US to share directly with allies and partners, including South Korea, Taiwan and Ukraine.

Sullivan noted that Biden has previously committed to turning the US into a modern day "arsenal of democracies" for vaccines, but that it

including paid time off and \$1 million lottery prizes.

As vaccinations have slowed it's become clear the US is unlikely to meet President Joe Biden's goal to have 70% of adults partially vaccinated by July 4. Roughly 64% of Americans older than 18 have had at least one dose, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

J&J's vaccine was highly anticipated because of its one-and-done formulation and easy-to-ship refrigeration. The shot was expected to play a key role in vaccination campaigns in rural areas and low-income countries with limited health care infrastructure.

But rival drugmakers Pfizer and Moderna, which started shipping shots months earlier, have already supplied more than enough doses to meet US demand.

More than 129 million Americans have been fully vaccinated with the companies' two-dose shots. By comparison, just 11 million Americans have been vaccinated with the J&J shot. About 10 million more J&J doses have been sent to states, according to the CDC.

Use of J&J's vaccine has been hurt by links to a rare blood clot disorder. That issue led US health officials to "pause" use of the shot for an 11-day review. Officials lifted the hold in late April after concluding that the vaccine's benefits outweighed its risks.

J&J's rollout has also been slowed by contamination problems at a Baltimore factory that helps make the shots. The facility was shuttered after an FDA inspection uncovered unsanitary conditions and other problems in April. None of the vaccines made there have been distributed.

also has health reasons for spreading vaccinations - preventing the rise of potentially dangerous variants - and geostrategic ones as well.

China and Russia have shared, with varying success, their domestically produced vaccines with some needy countries, often with hidden strings attached. Sullivan said Biden "does want to show - rallying the rest of the world's democracies - that democracies are the countries that can best deliver solutions for people everywhere."

The US-produced mRNA vaccines have also proven to be more effective against both the original strain and more dangerous variants of COVID-19 than the more conventional vaccines produced by China and Russia. Some countries that have had success in deploying those conventional vaccines have nonetheless seen cases spike.

Biden's decision to purchase the doses, officials said, was meant to keep them from getting locked up by richer nations that have the means to enter into purchasing agreements directly with manufacturers. Just last month, the European Commission signed an agreement to purchase as many as 1.8 billion Pfizer doses in the next two years, a significant share of the company's upcoming production - though the bloc reserved the right to donate some of its doses to COVAX.

Global public health groups have been aiming to use the G-7 meetings to press wealthier democracies to do more to share vaccines with the world. Biden's plans drew immediate praise.

Tom Hart, acting CEO at The ONE Campaign, a nonprofit that seeks to end poverty, said Biden's announcement was "the kind of bold leadership that is needed to end this global pandemic."

lead them back to their original home in the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture southwest of Kunming.

Authorities have been attempting to keep a distance between them and local residents, while blocking roads into villages and seeking to lure them away with food drops. Despite that, the herd of 15 have raided farms, strolled down urban streets and foraged for snacks in villages and even a retirement home. (AP)



Zurbuchen



Hasinger

(300 miles) north to the outskirts of the provincial capital of Kunming.

As of Saturday, they were spotted in Shijie township in the city of Yuxi, more than 8 kilometers (5 miles) southwest of the Kunming suburb they had arrived at last week, according to state media reports. The lone male was 16 kilometers (10 miles) away, still on the outskirts of Kunming.

The direction of their travel could be a good sign, since authorities are hoping to