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By Kate Randall
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Pandemic surges in the Americas as the global death toll nears 560,000

As of Friday evening, there were more than 12.4 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 worldwide and 559,622 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University. The trend of new cases is at record highs, averaging over 200,000 daily over the last week.

The United States is leading the global toll of new cases and deaths, with nearly 3.2 million cases and 133,885 deaths as of Friday evening, about a quarter of the global total of both metrics. Not far behind is Latin America, which has seen a surge in recent weeks, accounting for nearly half of all new COVID-19 cases globally.

US officials reported a record single-day spike of 60,021 coronavirus cases earlier this week, setting a single-day record for sixth time in 10 days. This surge has been largely driven by states in the country's South and West, which are seeing a dramatic rise in cases and deaths after being some of the first states to loosen restrictions to curb the spread of the virus.

Texas set a record for the fourth consecutive day on Thursday, recording more than 10,900 cases. At least six states set single-day records on Thursday, including Alabama, Idaho, Missouri, Montana, Oregon and Texas. In California, cases are up 275 percent since May 25.

Since the state began reopening in early May, Florida has seen average cases increase more than tenfold. Cases in Arizona have risen by 858 percent since May 8 when the state began to reopen; cases in Texas have jumped by 680 percent since May 1.

Hospitals across the country are seeing a surge of hospitalizations of COVID-19 cases, overwhelming capacity and staff.

- In Florida, 40 intensive care units (ICU) have reached capacity; hospitalizations in Miami-Dade County are up 74 percent.
- In Arizona, people are waiting in their cars in miles-long lines for testing, with tests running out and people waiting more than a week for results as labs are overwhelmed.
- In El Centro, California, on the Mexican border, a surge of COVID-19 patients has forced the Regional Medical Center to set up tents taking up half of the facility's parking lot.

Despite this burgeoning catastrophe, Donald Trump maintains that his administration is “handling it” and that “99 percent” of coronavirus cases are “totally harmless.” The basis of this contemptible attitude toward the suffering of the America people is the drive to force workers back on the job, no matter the cost to life.

One of the main focuses is opening public schools, placing the lives of teachers and children in danger so parents can get back on the job. In Florida, which has seen a more than 1200 percent rise in cases since reopening, Governor Ron DeSantis, a Republican, is moving forward with a plan to require “brick and mortar schools” to be open five days a week beginning in August. The governor has also vowed not to order reopened businesses to close.

On Friday, President Trump visited Florida, not to discuss the pandemic's toll of the state, but for a fundraiser focused on fighting drug trafficking.

Commenting Wednesday on the surge of cases in the US, infectious disease expert and White House health adviser Dr. Anthony Fauci, on a *Wall Street Journal* podcast, said that states should consider “shutting down” or “pausing in their opening process.” Over the past week, the US has reported an average 52,444 cases, up more than 30 percent over the previous week.

“What we are seeing is exponential growth,” Fauci said. “It went from an average of about 20,000 to 40,000 and 50,000. That's doubling. If you continue doubling, two times 50 is 100.” Hoping such sobering statistics will miraculously evaporate, Trump has reportedly not met face-to-face with Fauci in more than two months.

South of the United States, Latin America is seeing a similar surge in cases. Latin America is home to 8 percent of the global population, but accounts for nearly half of all recent

COVID-19 cases. Brazil has the second highest number of confirmed cases, 1.8 million, and 70,398 deaths, second only to the US. Mexico has also seen a recent surge in cases, recording 289,174 total cases and 34,191 deaths.

Following the Tuesday announcement of Brazil's fascistic pandemic-denying President Jair Bolsonaro that he tested positive for COVID-19, two other leading South American politicians have also tested positive for the virus: Diosdado Cabello, leader of Venezuela's Socialist Party, and Jeanine Áñez, right-wing interim president of Bolivia.

The World Health Organization (WHO) worldwide breakdown as of Friday is as follows:

Africa: 428,051 cases, 7,733 deaths

Americas: 6,264,626 cases, 276,370 deaths

Eastern Mediterranean: 1,238,779 cases, 29,690 deaths

Europe: 2,868,080 cases, 202,341 deaths

South-East Asia: 1,065,093 cases, 27,382 deaths

Western Pacific: 236,958 cases, 7,517 deaths

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO director-general, spoke on the rising tide of the pandemic at the WHO Member State Briefing on Thursday in Geneva. He said COVID-19 has "exploited the inequalities in our health systems and the schisms in our societies. It has exposed existing inequities, widening and deepening the cracks between us."

Ghebreyesus said, "We know that when countries take a comprehensive approach based on fundamental public health measures—such as find, isolate, test and treat cases, and trace and quarantine contacts—the outbreak can be brought under control," referring to countries like South Korea.

"But in most of the world the virus is not under control," he said. "It is getting worse," obliquely referring to the Americas and Trump. He noted that the total numbers of global cases had doubled in the last six weeks.

The director-general said that the damaging health effects of the pandemic stretch beyond the virus itself. "Hundreds of millions of children are at risk of missing out on routine vaccines for tuberculosis, pneumonia, measles, polio, cholera, diarrhea and others. Many countries are running low on HIV medicines."

Ghebreyesus referred to the impact of the pandemic on refugees who are “among the most vulnerable to the pandemic, already facing limited access to adequate shelter, water, nutrition, sanitation and health services. COVID-19 could push them over the brink.”

“And around the world,” he said, “in countries rich and poor, many more people are now going hungry, we can see poverty visibly now, with estimates from the World Food Program that global hunger could increase to more than 270 million people. These are not numbers: these are people.”

He added, “It has been made devastatingly clear that the best defense against health emergencies is a strong health system. A strong health system is a resilient health system.

That is why national governments and local governments need to invest in preparedness and essential public health functions.”

In a world in which health care systems are subordinated to the drive for profit and the enrichment of the health care system, such appeals from the director of the United Nations body will fall on deaf ears. Left to the likes of Trump, Bolsonaro and the UK’s Boris Johnson, nothing will be done to organize a scientifically based response to combat the pandemic.

The working class must take command of the situation, beginning with the establishment of workplace committees to protect the health of workers on the job and their families when they go home. Workers—whether at auto plants, restaurants, retail shops or schools—must be the ones to determine whether their conditions are safe. There are adequate funds in the coffers of the super-rich to ensure that wages, rents, groceries and other necessities are covered in the interim.

At a press conference on Wednesday, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo set aside the glaring statistics on coronavirus cases and death in the US, telling reporters, “Of course the US remains the world leader in the pandemic.” Pompeo said the “world turns its eyes” to American scientists and researchers to develop treatments and to US aid to assist other countries in fighting the COVID-19 outbreaks. He neglected to say that the Trump administration turns its eyes away from the same scientific guidance.

The reality? The US has providing a paltry \$1.3 billion to more than 120 countries in emergency health, humanitarian and economic assistance during the pandemic, the State Department said Friday.

By contrast, the CARES Act, passed with the unanimous support of the Democrats and Republicans, authorized the multi-trillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street and the corporate elite, with no restrictions. The US House Armed Services Committee also just approved an \$840 billion budget, to fund the US military's aggressive wars abroad while the pandemic rages at home.

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