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Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic: overview of global situation

An overview of the global situation highlighting areas of concern

Key points:

- Several million cases of COVID-19 and over 250,000 deaths are confirmed in this pandemic so far.
- Cumulatively, European countries (including the UK) have reported the greatest number of cases and deaths to date.
- Some countries report a declining trend in number of cases and deaths, others have yet to reach the peak in their epidemic curve.
- Difference in the ways COVID-19 cases and deaths are counted make comparison of data challenging.

On 30 January 2020, the Director-General (DG) of the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) under the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005) [1].

Almost every country in the world has now reported cases of COVID-19 during the ongoing pandemic, which started in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China at the end of December 2019. By early May 2020, over 3 million confirmed cases, including over 250,000 deaths had been reported worldwide with tens of thousands of new cases reported daily [2]. The pandemic is dynamic; sporadic cases, clusters of cases or more widespread community transmission has occurred with numbers peaking, and then either plateauing or declining as the outbreak progresses. Second or subsequent further peaks are possible.

In this still evolving pandemic, case numbers can change very quickly. Approaches to surveillance and reporting systems differ and this makes comparison between countries challenging e.g. data may include deaths in hospital but not community settings. Cause specific mortality rate (e.g. the number of deaths attributed to COVID-19 per 100,000 population), can be useful in evaluating the burden of COVID-19 disease in a country [3].

As of 11 May 2020, the [WHO European Region](#) (which includes UK) reported the greatest burden of COVID-19 disease so far (1,707,946 confirmed cases with 155,552 deaths in a population of ≈446 million) [4]. The first cases in Europe were reported in France on 23 January 2020. At the end of February 2020, a sharp increase in the cumulative number of cases seen in Europe was observed. Although Italy was the first country in Europe to experience a very rapid increase in case numbers, by the middle of March, many other European countries (or countries neighbouring Europe) were following a similar trajectory, with the progression of the outbreak in Europe largely following that of Hubei, China [5]. The cumulative number of cases in the European Region has quickly surpassed that of China, with the highest case numbers to date reported in Spain, UK, Italy, Germany and France [6], followed closely by the Russian Federation and Turkey [7]. As of 11 May 2020, European countries with the highest deaths/100,000 population (though not necessarily the largest number of cases overall) were Belgium (75.8), Spain (57), Italy (50.6) and UK (47.9) [6]. By the end of April 2020, following stringent public health measures including 'lockdown' in many European countries, most EU/European Economic Area countries note decreases or a slow-down in the increase in the daily number of newly reported cases [8].

The first cases in the [WHO Region of the Americas](#) were reported in Brazil (January 2020) and the Caribbean (February 2020). Since then, COVID-19 has spread to 50 countries and territories in the Americas, with a rapid increase in cases reported during recent weeks in Brazil, Peru and Mexico. Brazil and the United States (US) account for most cases. As of 09 May 2020, the cumulative total confirmed cases in the US reached 1,271,645 with 76,916 deaths in a population of ≈331 million) [9]. In the US, state by state, there are wide geographic differences in case numbers, deaths and incidence of COVID-19 and mortality rates overall [10]. Exceptionally, in the outbreak in densely populated New York City (NYC), a rapid increase in the number of cases and deaths was reported during late March and early April 2020 [8]; as of 10 May 2020, NYC had reported more cases than some countries in Europe (178,766 with 14,753 deaths) but the number of new cases now appears to be declining [11].

As of 10 May 2020, [WHO South East Asia Region](#) the cumulative total of confirmed cases and deaths is 95,314/3,556; so far the greatest number of confirmed cases and deaths are in India, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Thailand [2, 4].

In the [WHO Western Pacific Region](#), since the first case in the pandemic was reported from China at the end of December, 2019, all 22 countries in this region have reported cases (the majority reported by China) [2,4]. Following China's early response to the outbreak, the number of new cases has decreased, and the outbreak seems to be contained. However, since mid-March 2020, and following relaxation of control measures, new cases have been imported into China [12]. In Singapore, where the initial outbreak was effectively contained by strict public health measures, a second wave of cases has occurred, the majority in migrant workers [13].

[WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region](#) of the 255,728 cases reported to date in the region, 106,220 are reported from Iran [2,4].

Cases and deaths in the [WHO Africa Region](#) have continued to rise since the first case was reported in February 2020. As of 10 May 2020, South Africa, Algeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and DRC accounted for the majority of the 42,626 cases reported in the region.

Many countries in the world have fragile healthcare and surveillance systems and inadequate capacity to respond rapidly to public health emergencies. Efforts to strengthen preparedness and response plans in vulnerable countries are underway. WHO and United Nations have launched the COVID-19 Humanitarian Relief Plan [14] and further [advice for UK humanitarian aid workers is available](#).

Data for all countries are subject to change. Currently the Situation Reports cited in this News Item are updated at the original source each day. Please refer to the original source for updated data.

Resources

- [COVID-19 \(coronavirus\): general advice for travellers](#)
- [Foreign and Commonwealth Office \(FCO\): Travel advice - coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Foreign and Commonwealth Office \(FCO\): Foreign Travel Advice \[country list\]](#)
- [Public Health England - Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance](#)

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14. [United Nations. Launch of Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19. New York. 25 March 2020](#) [Accessed 11 May 2020]