

1492

Christopher Columbus sets sail on his first voyage with three ships, Santa María, Pinta and Niña from Palos de la Frontera, Spain for the "Indies"

1914

Germany invades Belgium and declares war on France, beginning World War I

1934

Adolf Hitler merges the offices of German Chancellor and President, declaring himself "Führer" (leader)



1972

US Senate ratifies the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with the Soviet Union to limit the use of missile systems capable of defending against missile-delivered nuclear weapons

Delta spreads 'like wildfire' as doctors study whether it makes patients sicker

● Delta is as contagious as chickenpox and far more contagious than the common cold or flu, according to the CDC report.

Reuters | Los Angeles

With a new wave of COVID-19 infections fuelled by the Delta variant striking countries worldwide, disease experts are scrambling to learn whether the latest version of coronavirus is making people - mainly the unvaccinated - sicker than before.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned that Delta, first identified in India and now dominant worldwide, is "likely more severe" than earlier versions of the virus, according to an internal report made public on Friday.

The agency cited research in Canada, Singapore and Scotland showing that people infected with the Delta variant were more likely to be hospitalized than patients earlier in the pandemic.

In interviews with Reuters, disease experts said the three papers suggest a greater risk from the variant, but the study populations are limited and the findings have not yet been reviewed by outside experts. Doctors treating patients



infected with Delta described a more rapid onset of COVID-19 symptoms, and in many regions an overall increase in serious cases.

But the experts said more work is needed to compare outcomes among larger numbers of individuals in epidemiologic studies to sort out whether one variant causes more severe disease than another.

"It's difficult to pin down increase in severity and population bias," said Lawrence Young, a virologist at the UK's Warwick Medical School.

In addition, it is likely that the extraordinary rate of Delta transmission is also contributing to a greater number of severe cases arriving at hospitals, the experts said.

Delta is as contagious as chickenpox and far more contagious than the common cold or flu, ac-

cording to the CDC report.

Shane Crotty, a virologist at the La Jolla Institute for Immunology in San Diego, said the clearest indication that the variant may cause more severe disease comes from the Scotland study, which found that Delta roughly doubled the risk of hospitalization compared to an earlier version.

For vaccinated, otherwise healthy individuals, the odds are that if they contract COVID-19 they will only experience asymptomatic or mild disease, said Dr. Gregory Poland, infectious disease expert at the Mayo Clinic.

"But they can pass it on to family members and others who may not be so lucky," Poland said. "We have to be vaccinated and masked or we will, for the fourth time now, endure another surge and out of that will come worse variants."



The majority of hospitalizations and deaths from coronavirus in the United States are occurring in people who have not been vaccinated. But there is evidence that the shots are less effective in people with compromised immune systems, including the elderly.

'FULL-ON FLAMES'

The rate of severe illness, especially in regions where vaccination rates are low, is again straining healthcare workers on the front lines of the pandemic.

"This is like a wildfire, this is not a smoldering campfire. It is full-on flames right now," said Dr. Michelle Barron, senior medical director of infection prevention and control at Colorado's UCHealth.

Research from China suggesting that the Delta variant replicates much faster and generates 1,000 times more virus in the body compared to the original strain highlights the biggest danger of this new wave, Barron said.

India's monsoon rains forecast to be average in August, September

Reuters | New Delhi

India is likely to receive an average amount of rainfall in August and September, the state-run weather office said yesterday, raising expectations of higher crop yields in Asia's third-biggest economy, which relies heavily on the vast farm sector.

"As per most parameters, we expect monsoon rains to be normal in August and September this year," Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, Director General of the India Meteorological Department (IMD), told a news conference.

The IMD defines average, or normal, rainfall as between 96% and 104% of a 50-year average of 88 cms (34 inches) for the four-month season beginning in June.

In August, monsoon rains are likely to be "below normal to normal" in the central region, Mohapatra said, where soybean and cotton are grown.

Farmers generally start planting rice, corn, cotton, soybeans, sugarcane and peanuts, among other crops, from June 1, when monsoon rains typically arrive in India. Sowing usually lasts until July or early August.

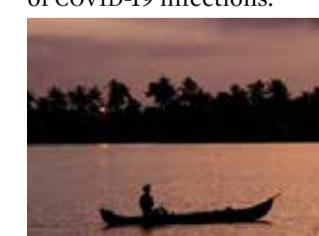
Indian farmers have planted summer-sown crops on 84.8 million hectares, down 4.7% year-on-year, according to the latest data from the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare.

The area planted with cotton stood at 11 million hectares versus 12.1 million hectares the previous year, while soybean covered 9.3 million hectares, down 3.4% from a year earlier.

After lashing the southernmost Kerala coast on June 3, the monsoon spread to two-thirds of India by the end of the first half of the month, nearly 15 days earlier than expected. And then it tapered off in the third week of June.

While monsoon rains were still 10% above average in June, they turned 7% below average in July. Overall rains have been 1% below average so far in the season that began in June.

In June, the IMD said India was likely to receive average monsoon rains this year, boosting expectations for larger farm output amid a devastating second wave of COVID-19 infections.



A man rows his boat in the tributary waters of Vembanad Lake



TOP
4
TWEETS

01



Today I nominated Croatia to join the Visa Waiver Program. This step towards visa-free travel recognizes Croatia's tremendous progress to meet the rigorous standards for participant countries. We look forward to an even stronger U.S.-Croatia relationship.

@SecBlinken

02



"We must be faster in distributing vaccines all over the world. We must aim higher at vaccinating 70% of the population of all countries by the middle of next year...

And we must #DoItAll together, in solidarity."

@DrTedros

03



Congratulations to @TeamGB on winning their first gold medal in team eventing since 1972, and well done to @TomMcEwen1 and Toledo de Kerser for taking silver in the individual eventing.

@BorisJohnson

04



The launch of e-RUPI is in line with our efforts to make India a leader in Fintech and leverage technology to boost 'Ease of Living.'

@narendramodi

ment es hospital



Head of the moderate Islamist Ennahda, S, Tunisia

US to take in thousands more Afghan refugees

● President Joe Biden has ordered a withdrawal of remaining US troops by the end of the month, ending the longest war in US history

● Biden administration acknowledges fears for the stability of the internationally backed government

AFP | Washington



Afghan internally displaced families arrive in Kandahar as they flee battles between Taliban fighters and Afghan security forces

The United States said yesterday it will take in thousands more Afghan refugees, fearing for the safety of people with US associations as America ends its longest war.

The State Department said it will expand the eligibility of refugee admissions beyond the roughly 20,000 Afghans who have already applied -- with some being evacuated out -- under a programme for interpreters who assisted US forces.

"In light of increased levels of Taliban violence, the US government is working to provide certain Afghans, including those who worked with the United States, the opportunity for refugee resettlement to the United States," the State Department said in a statement.

This designation expands the opportunity to permanently resettle in the United States to many thousands of Afghans and their immediate family members who may be at risk due to their US affiliation," it said.

The State Department said that the expanded eligibility will include Afghans who worked with US-based media organizations or non-governmental organizations or on projects backed by US funding.

The State Department will also let in more Afghans who served as interpreters or in other support roles to forces of the US-led coalition but did not meet earlier requirements on time served.

The State Department is des-

ignating Afghan refugees with US affiliations under so-called Priority 2, the same level given to persecuted minorities from a number of countries.

President Joe Biden has ordered a withdrawal of remaining US troops by the end of the month, ending the longest war in US history.

With the Taliban going on the offensive, the Biden administration acknowledges fears for the stability of the internationally backed government.

But it insists that the United States has done all that it can and has accomplished its priority mission of eliminating al-Qaeda extremists who carried out the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Party figures regard the current crisis as the biggest Ennahda has faced since 2011 and a growing number of members have called on Ghannouchi to quit. On Friday he postponed a meeting of the party's powerful Choura council at short notice.



Party figures regard the current crisis as the biggest Ennahda has faced since 2011 and a growing number of members have called on Ghannouchi to quit. On Friday he postponed a meeting of the party's powerful Choura council at short notice.

Disclaimer: (Views expressed by columnists are personal and need not necessarily reflect our editorial stances)