

Summer unlikely to curb coronavirus pandemic growth: study

AFP | Washington

The higher summer temperatures in the Northern Hemisphere are unlikely to significantly limit the growth of the coronavirus pandemic, according to a Princeton University study published Monday in the journal *Science*.

Several statistical studies conducted over the past few months have shown a slight correlation between climate and the novel coronavirus -- the hotter and more humid it is, the less likely the virus is to spread.

But the findings remain preliminary, and much remains unknown about the exact relationship between climate and COVID-19.

The Princeton study does not rule out the correlation entirely but concludes that the impact of climate on the spread of the virus is "modest."

"Our findings suggest, without effective control measures, strong outbreaks are likely in more humid climates and summer weather will not substantially limit pandemic growth," the study said.

"We project that warmer or more humid climates will not slow the virus at the early stage of the pandemic," said Rachel Baker, a postdoctoral research associate in the Princeton Environmental Institute (PEI).

While climate, particularly humidity, plays a role in the spread of other coronaviruses and the flu, the study said a more important factor is the absence of widespread immunity to COVID-19.

"We do see some influence of climate on the size and timing of the pandemic, but, in general, because there's so much susceptibility in the population,

the virus will spread quickly no matter the climate conditions," Baker said.

Baker said the spread of the virus seen in countries such as Brazil, Ecuador and Australia indicates that warmer conditions do little to halt the pandemic.

"It doesn't seem that climate is regulating spread right now," Baker said.

Without strong containment measures or a vaccine, the coronavirus may continue to infect a large proportion of the world's population, the researchers said, and only become seasonal later, "after the supply of unexposed hosts is reduced."

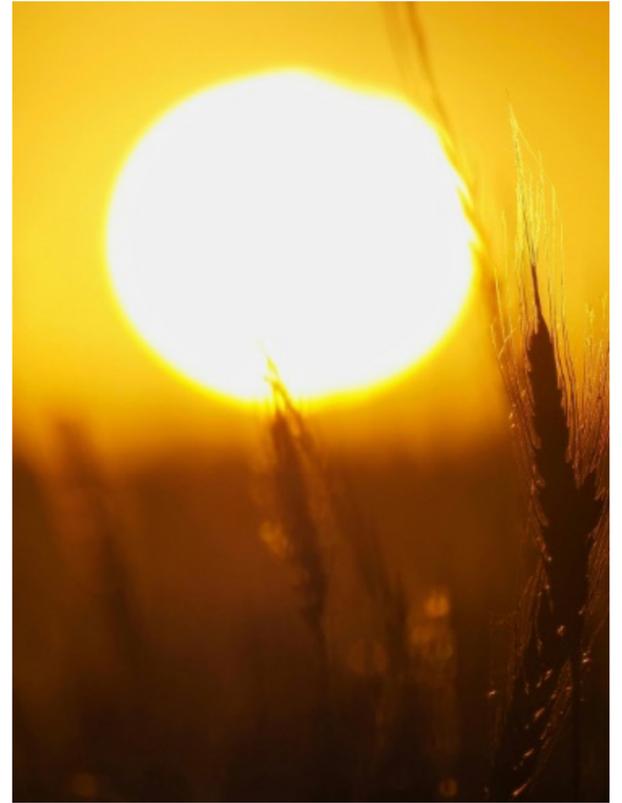
"Previously circulating human coronaviruses such as the common cold depend strongly on seasonal factors, peaking in the winter outside of the tropics," said co-author Bryan Grenfell, professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at PEI.

"If, as seems likely, the novel coronavirus is similarly seasonal, we might expect it to settle down to become a winter virus as it becomes endemic in the population," Grenfell said.

For the study, the researchers conducted simulations on how the pandemic would respond to various climates. They ran scenarios based on what is known about the effect seasonal variations have on similar viruses.

In all three scenarios, climate only became a mitigating factor when large portions of the human population were immune or resistant to the virus.

"The more that immunity builds up in the population, the more we expect the sensitivity to climate to increase," Baker said. "If you run the model long enough, you have a big pandemic and the outbreak settles into seasonal infection."



Two arrested in US for cross-border kidnap plot that left two dead



A commuter wearing a protective mask to avoid the spread of the coronavirus, COVID-19, shows his ID to a Customs and Border Protection agent as crossing the US-Mexico border at San Ysidro port of entry in Tijuana, Baja California state, Mexico

Los Angeles

A US woman and her boyfriend have been arrested and are facing federal charges for their alleged part in a plot in which three California residents were recently kidnapped while in Mexico and two were killed.

Leslie Briana Matla, 20, a US citizen who lives in Mexico, was arrested last Thursday and Juan Carlos Montoya Sanchez, 25, of Tijuana, was arrested on Sunday, the US Department of Justice said.

Both face federal charges of money laundering and conspiracy for their alleged role in the kidnapping plot.

Authorities said Matla crossed the border from Mexico into the United States on three occasions in April and March to collect ransom payments from the families of the kidnap victims, who were residents of San

Diego, Norwalk and Pasadena.

The men were kidnapped March 28, April 13 and April 22 while on business or visiting family in Tijuana, located just across the border from San Diego, officials said.

In each case, the families of the victims were notified via a caller with a Mexican number to deposit ransom money at a specific location.

"Mexican authorities found the San Diego victim's body on March 29 -- one day after the victim's adult son placed a bag containing \$25,000 inside the women's restroom of a McDonald's restaurant in San Ysidro," prosecutors said.

"The body of the Norwalk victim was found in Mexico on April 14, one day after the victim's family tried, but did not succeed, to pay a \$25,000 ransom to a woman whom law enforcement believes was Matla, at a Lowe's (store) parking lot in Norwalk," they added.

The Pasadena man was rescued by law enforcement in Tijuana after a family member called police on April 22 to report he had been kidnapped with a \$20,000 ransom demand.

The man was found at a hotel where the other victims had been held, according to cell phone records.

"A review of US-Mexico border crossing records, security camera videos from the various pickup locations, and social media led law enforcement to identify Matla, as the woman sent to ... to pick up the ransom money on the dates in question," prosecutors said.

They added that records show that Montoya Sanchez received wire transfers from two of the kidnapping victims.

If convicted, Matla and Montoya Sanchez face life in prison. Nine other suspects have been arrested in Mexico.

Baby boom: Indonesia faces virus-driven spike in births



About 4.8 million babies are born annually in Indonesia, a country of more than 260 million Jakarta

Indonesia is facing a baby boom that could see more than 400,000 unplanned pregnancies as coronavirus lockdowns cut access to birth control, the national family planning agency said Tuesday.

Small health clinics have been temporarily shuttered while doctors and midwives are limiting patient numbers since the Southeast Asian nation implemented a partial lockdown last month to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

That has made it more difficult for Indonesians to access birth control, the agency said.

By early next year, Indonesia -- the world's fourth most populous country -- could see 420,000 more babies born than would otherwise be expected, the agency estimated.

The figure is based on 10 percent of its 28 million member nationwide family planning practice having trouble getting birth control. About 4.8 million babies are born annually in Indonesia, a country of more than 260 million.



A worker wearing a full body suit holds a STOP sign in front of a Food market as he manages the flow of the customers in the Jackson Heights neighbourhood of Queens in New York City.



Protest in Santiago, Chile
Demonstrators clash with riot police during a protest against Chilean President Sebastian Pinera's government amid the COVID-19 pandemic, in Santiago, Chile.

Endangered Sumatran tiger found dead in Indonesia



A Sumatran tiger has been found dead in an apparent case of poaching, Indonesian authorities said Tuesday, underscoring the threats to the survival of the critically endangered species. The 18-month-old male's decomposing body was found on Monday with its leg caught in a trap near a palm oil plantation in Sumatra's Riau province. "It had already been dead for several days when the team found it," said local conservation agency head Suharyono, who like many Indonesians goes by one name. "We concluded it was intentional because the hunter tied a pig carcass to the trap in order to attract and kill the tiger."