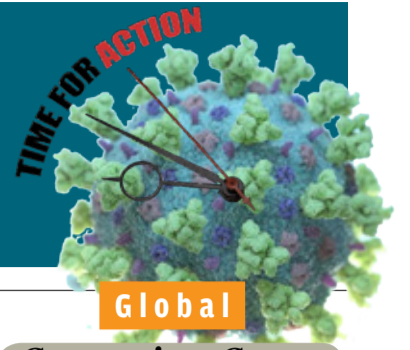


world



'Coronavirus could become seasonal'

- Virus does better in colder weather than it does in hot and humid conditions
- Viruses degrade more quickly on hotter surfaces, possibly because a protective layer of fat that envelops them dries out quicker
- Reduced infection rate does not mean the virus gets eliminated



Anthony Fauci, who leads research into infectious diseases at the National Institutes of Health, told a briefing the virus was beginning to take root in the southern hemisphere, where winter is on its way

AFP | Washington

There is a strong chance the new coronavirus could return in seasonal cycles, a senior US scientist said,

underscoring the urgent need to find a vaccine and effective treatments.

Anthony Fauci, who leads research into infectious diseases at the National Institutes of

Health, told a briefing the virus was beginning to take root in the southern hemisphere, where winter is on its way.

"What we're starting to see now... in southern Africa and

in the southern hemisphere countries, is that we're having cases that are appearing as they go into their winter season," he said. "And if, in fact, they have a substantial outbreak, it will be inevitable that we need to be prepared that we'll get a cycle around the second time."

"It totally emphasizes the need to do what we're doing in developing a vaccine, testing it quickly and trying to get it ready so that we'll have a vaccine available for that next cycle."

There are currently two vaccines that have entered human trials -- one in the US and one in China -- and they could be a year to a year-and-a-half away from deployment. Treatments are also being investigated -- some new drugs and others that have been repurposed, including the antimalarials chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine.

"I know we'll be successful in

putting this down now, but we really need to be prepared for another cycle," Fauci concluded.

Fauci's comments suggesting the virus does better in colder weather than it does in hot and humid conditions follows a recent Chinese research paper -- still preliminary and awaiting peer-review -- that reached the same conclusion.

The reasons are thought to include that respiratory droplets remain airborne for longer in colder weather, and that cold weather weakens immunity.

Another potential reason is that viruses degrade more quickly on hotter surfaces, possibly because a protective layer of fat that envelops them dries out quicker.

But reduced infection rate does not mean the virus gets eliminated -- Australia has had almost 2,500 confirmed cases and 8 deaths, for example.

Coronavirus Cases:

503,274

Deaths

22,342

Recovered:

121,227

Active cases

359,705

Closed cases

143,569

Country	Total cases	Total Deaths
China	81,285	3,287
Italy	74,386	7,503
USA	68,905	1,037
Spain	56,188	4,089
Germany	40,585	229
Iran	29,406	2,234
France	25,233	1,331
Switzerland	11,575	172
SKorea	9,241	131
UK	9,849	477
Canada	3,409	36
Turkey	2,433	59
Russia	840	3
India	719	16
B'desh	44	5
Pakistan	1,130	9
Thailand	1,045	4
Indonesia	893	78
Philippines	707	45

Pope reportedly tests negative after Vatican scare

Pope Francis was reported yesterday to have tested negative for the novel coronavirus after a person in his residence was said to have contacted COVID-19.

Several Italian newspapers with reputable sources in the Vatican said the Italian clergyman who got sick had lived for years in the pope's Saint Martha's residence.

Il Messaggero said the person is "one of the pope's closest collaborators, an official of the Secretariate of the State, who was found to have a slight temperature after going in for a routine check".

The daily La Stampa said the unnamed person has been hospitalised in Rome and that his office has been disinfected.

Il Messaggero later reported that the pope himself was tested for the virus and came out clean.

The 83-year-old pontiff has remained largely secluded at his residence since coming down with a cold late last month.

World leaders to hold crisis talks as virus toll tops 21,000

Madrid

World leaders are to hold online crisis talks on the coronavirus pandemic that has forced three billion people into lockdown and claimed more than 21,000 lives.

With the disease tearing around the globe at a terrifying pace, warnings are multiplying over its economic consequences, with experts saying it could cause more damage than the Great Depression.

"COVID-19 is threatening the whole of humanity -- and the whole of humanity must fight back," UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said, launching an appeal for \$2 bil-



US President Donald Trump said he would have a recommendation 'before Easter' on whether parts of the US can reopen

lion to help the world's poor. "Global action and solidarity are crucial," he said. "Individual country responses are not going to be enough."

\$2 trillion rescue package passes US Senate, heads to House

Washington

The US Senate unanimously passed the nation's largest-ever rescue package late Wednesday, a \$2 trillion lifeline to suffering Americans, critically depleted hospitals and an economy ravaged by a rapidly spreading coronavirus crisis. The measure cleared the Senate 96-0 after days of

tumultuous, sometimes bitter negotiations and debate, as the US death toll for the pandemic soared past 1,000, with 68,000 confirmed infections.

The measure now heads to the House of Representatives, where a Democratic leader said he expected it to pass by voice vote Friday before it goes to President Donald Trump for his signature.

India outlines \$23bn stimulus to help poor hit by lockdown

Reuters | New Delhi

India announced yesterday a 1.7-trillion-rupee (\$22.6-billion) economic stimulus plan providing direct cash transfers and food security measures to give relief to millions of poor people hit by a nationwide lockdown over a coronavirus pandemic.

People queued in some cities for essential items, with trucks stranded at state borders and public transport suspended two days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi ordered the 21-day lockdown to protect a population of 1.3 billion.

"We do not want anyone to remain hungry, so we will be giving them enough to take care of food grain requirements and protein requirements, in terms of pulses," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman told a news briefing.

Police have enforced the lockdown strictly, even though Modi said essential services would be maintained.

Yesterday's package would tackle the welfare concerns of the poor and suffering workers, and those who need immediate help, Sitharaman added.

The government aims to distribute 5 kilograms of staple foodgrains wheat or rice for



India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das arrive to attend the RBI's central board meeting in New Delhi

each person free of cost, with a kilogram of pulses for every low-income family, helping to feed about 800 million poor people over the next three months.

It also aims to hand out free cooking gas cylinders to 83 million poor families, in addition to direct cash transfers to 200 million women and the elderly, over a similar period.

The government outlined plans for medical insurance cover of 5 million rupees (\$66,000) for every frontline health worker, from doctors, nurses and paramedics to those involved in sanitary services.

Among other financial relief, the government plans to release funds for the Employees' Provident Fund in some small firms in a measure aimed at covering 48 million workers.

China will continue to support global virus fight, Xi tells WHO

Reuters | Beijing

China's control of the coronavirus outbreak continues to improve and the country will keep offering anti-epidemic support globally to the best of its ability, state media cited President Xi Jinping as saying in a letter to the World Health Organization (WHO) yesterday.

China will adjust its anti-virus focus in accordance with changes in the situation at home and abroad, and continue to support the WHO in the fight against the virus, Xi told WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom, the official Xinhua news agency reported.



Middle East

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases	Serious, Critical	Tot cases/1m pop
Bahrain	457	+38	4		204	249	1	269
Saudi Arabia	1,012	+112	3	+1	33	976	6	29
UAE	333		2		52	279	2	34
Kuwait	208	+13			49	159	7	49
Oman	109	+10			23	86		19
Jordan	154				1	153		21
Iraq	382	+36	36	+7	105	241		9
Egypt	456		21		95	340		4

Beware second waves if lockdowns eased early: study

Reuters | London

Extending school and work closures at the coronavirus' ground zero in China may delay a second wave of infections, researchers said yesterday, urging the rest of the world to take note.

A study in The Lancet Public Health journal suggested continuing Wuhan's shutdowns until April would push a potential second wave of COVID-19 - the disease



Residents bid farewell from their homes to a medical team from Guizhou province who is leaving Wuhan

caused by the new virus - until later in the year. That would give health services more time to recover and expand, potentially saving

lives. "The city now needs to be really careful to avoid prematurely lifting physical distancing measures, because that could lead to an earlier secondary peak in cases," said Kieasha Prem, a specialist at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), who co-led the research.

"If they relax the restrictions gradually, this is likely to both delay and flatten the peak."