

Pandemic - Global report: Philippines 'losing battle' as WHO records biggest jump in Covid-19 cases

Saturday 1 August 2020, by [FARRER Martin](#), [FONBUENA Carmela](#) (Date first published: 1 August 2020).

Filipino medics plead for lockdown as health system teeters; US suffers deadliest month; South Korea arrest sect leader.

Senior doctors in the Philippines have pleaded with the government to impose a strict lockdown in the capital Manila or risk losing the battle to contain the spread of coronavirus.

As the World Health Organization recorded the highest daily number of new cases so far during the pandemic, the medics said the Philippines' fragile health system needed a "time out" to avert collapse.

Two of Manila City's largest government hospitals temporarily closed this week as infections have hit healthcare workers. Many hospitals in the capital also reported full capacity of their Covid-19 beds and have closed their doors to new patients.

"Our health workers are suffering burnout with seemingly endless number of patients trooping to our hospitals for emergency care and admission," said Jose Santiago, president of the leading doctors' group Philippine Medical Association.

"We are waging a losing battle against Covid-19 and we need to draw up a consolidated and definitive plan of action."

The doctors' groups issued the joint statement as the country posted a record of about 4,000 cases each day in the past two days, putting its total to 93,354 infections as of 31 July. It has the second highest number of cases in south-east Asia although the recent numbers have prompted fears it could soon overtake Indonesia, which has more than 108,000 total cases.

They asked the president, Rodrigo Duterte, to reimpose strict lockdown in the country capital and nearby provinces from 1 to 15 August to give health workers a "time out". They said the government should also use the time to "recalibrate strategies against Covid-19".

Aileen Espina of the Philippine Society of Public Health Physicians said: "We have been in this fight since March. We feel we are nearing the end of our line. We are appealing for everyone's help."

The Philippines imposed one of the longest and strictest lockdowns in the region not seen in other countries, but the doctors said poor detection, isolation, and contact tracing have failed to contain the disease. Since lockdowns were eased, outbreaks in construction sites and industrial plants have been reported.

July has become the worst month of the coronavirus pandemic in the **United States** after deaths rose by close to 25,000 and new cases doubled in at least 18 states. The US recorded close to 1.8m new Covid-19 cases in July, bringing the total to more than 4.5m and deaths to more 152,000.

California has passed New York as the state with the most infections, racking up 493,140 coronavirus cases since the start of the pandemic. It has reported a record number of deaths on four separate days in just over a week.

With more than 17.5 million people infected with Covid-19 around the world and 679,439 people have died, according to Johns Hopkins University. The WHO said a record 292,527 new cases were added on Friday with the bulk coming from the US, **Brazil, India and South Africa**.

Dr Anthony Fauci, America's leading infectious diseases expert, struck a more positive note when he told US Congress on Friday that he was "cautiously optimistic" that a "safe and effective" coronavirus vaccine will be available to the public by the end of 2020.

The **UK** prime minister, Boris Johnson, warned that the country could face a second lockdown unless people abided by the rules of social distancing and hygiene measures such as wearing a face mask.

He said he was pausing the reopening of leisure businesses in England, such as casinos and bowling alleys, and preventing beauty salons resuming close-up treatments, for at least two weeks to limit the threat of a full-blown resurgence. Parts of northern England have been placed back in lockdown.

South Korea authorities have arrested the founder of a secretive Christian sect at the centre of the country's largest outbreak of Covid-19 infections. It is alleged that Lee Man-hee, 89, hid crucial information about some members of his Shincheonji Church of Jesus from contact-tracers as they sought to establish how the virus was spreading as the country suffered its most serious outbreak in February.

The church is linked to more than 5,200 coronavirus infections, or 36% of South Korea's total cases.

A second person died of coronavirus complications in **Vietnam**, officials said on Saturday, a day after it recorded its first-ever death as it struggles with a renewed outbreak after 99 days with no local cases.

Deaths in **Australia** have passed 200 after three further deaths were recorded in Victoria and one person died in New South Wales. Victoria is at the heart of a second wave of infections, with the state's care homes especially badly hit.

The lockdown has helped to halve rhino poaching in **South Africa**, the country's environment minister said on Friday. During the first six months of the year, 166 rhino were poached in South Africa, compared with 316 in the first half of 2019, Barbara Creecy said, a drop of 53%.

International smuggling routes had also been disrupted, affecting the trade in horns, but poaching had started to increase again as the lockdown eased.

Carmela Fonbuena in Manila and Martin Farrer

P.S.

- The Guardian. Sat 1 Aug 2020 07.39 BST. First published on Sat 1 Aug 2020 07.18 BST:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/01/global-report-philippines-losing-battle-as-who-reco-rds-biggest-jump-in-covid-19-cases>

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