

Colombia surpasses one million COVID-19 cases



Colombia is the eighth country to top a million infections, after U.S., India, Brazil, Russia, Argentina, Spain and France. (Photo: AP)

Bogota, October 25 (RHC)-- Colombia has surpassed one million confirmed coronavirus cases, becoming the second country in Latin America to report that number in less than a week.

The last 24 hours saw 8,769 new infections, bringing the total to 1,007,711 since the first case was detected on March 6, the country's health ministry said on Saturday. Deaths rose to 30,000 after authorities added 198 fatalities from the last 10 days.

Argentina hit one million confirmed cases on Monday and Peru and Mexico are expected to reach the grim marker in the weeks ahead. Brazil ranks third worldwide in the number of virus cases and passed one million infections four months ago -- in June.

With 50 million people, Colombia is the eighth country to top a million infections. Besides Argentina and Brazil, the others are the United States, India, Russia, France and Spain, according to Johns Hopkins University data.

At an event in Chinchina, Caldas, President Ivan Duque claimed that Colombia has a relatively low death rate among Latin American countries on a per capita basis. "We did much better than other countries. But I do not say this so that we feel proud, I say it because we must protect ourselves better," he said.

Colombia went under a national lockdown on March 25, then relaxed restrictions to shore up its collapsing economy, with unemployment in cities climbing to an all-time high of 19.6 percent in August.

Since September 1, the country has been relying on individual responsibility and widespread use of masks in public places. The six-month lockdown did help slow contagion and gave officials time to expand the number of ICU beds. While cases rose dramatically in Bogota, stretching hospital capacity, the city has managed to avoid the sorts of dire scenes seen elsewhere in the region of patients lined up outside hospitals, struggling to find a bed.

Overall, Latin America has continued to register some of the highest caseloads, diagnosing more than 100,000 confirmed infections each day, though the World Health Organization reports that Europe is now seeing even larger numbers as a second wave of the virus strikes.

Experts said the region is experiencing a table-top like effect in which cases remain relatively high instead of dramatically dropping. In a number of countries, the virus has begun spreading to areas that had previously registered relatively few cases.

"The behavior of the virus is different," said Dr Luis Jorge Hernandez, a public health professor at the University of the Andes in Colombia. "It's not a big resurgence, but new outbreaks."

The path of the virus through Latin America is a consequence of weak public health systems, social factors like poverty and poor government decisions early on that resulted in flawed or limited testing and little contact tracing.

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