

Brazil's coronavirus cases soar as toll on indigenous communities raises alarm



Brasilia, May 19 (RHC)-- Brazil saw thousands of new cases of COVID-19 over the past few days, surpassing both Italy and Spain to become the fourth most affected country in the world.

Over the weekend, Brazil's health minister quit after just a few weeks on the job. Nelson Teich gave no reason for his abrupt resignation, but he reportedly refused to support Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's promotion of the drug hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19 patients. The drug was touted by Bolsonaro's U.S. ally, President Trump, but studies show it confers no benefit on coronavirus patients and has potentially deadly side effects.

Last month, Bolsonaro fired his previous health minister for recommending social distancing measures.

Bolsonaro continues to dismiss COVID-19 as a "little flu," and on Sunday he joined a packed rally of supporters in Brasília, pulling children out of the crowd for photographs in violation of public health advice.

Meanwhile, a new study finds over 400 cases of COVID-19 and 90 deaths among Indigenous people in Brazil, raising fears of a rapid spread in communities with little access to healthcare.

Vanderlecia Ortega dos Santos, a nurse in an Indigenous community outside the city of Manaus, spoke at a funeral for Chief Messias Kokama, who died of COVID-19. She said: “Here, we still have this dream of quality education and health, because we have not yet been provided with assistance. His death is also representative of what’s lacking, a lack of healthcare, of what’s missing for those Indigenous who live in the city.”

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