

Pakistan's hospitals full amid second wave of coronavirus

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Students wearing facemasks attend school amid the COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan. (Photo: AFP)

Karachi, November 25 (RHC)-- Intensive care units across Pakistan are nearing capacity as a second, deadlier wave of the coronavirus builds momentum and officials struggle to counter public indifference to the pandemic.

Several doctors told AFP on Wednesday that hospitals are having to turn away suspected Covid-19 patients, with the potential for a major health care crisis increasing daily. “The coming two weeks are critical and our situation is going to worsen,” said Qaisar Sajjad, secretary general of the Pakistan Medical Association. “Around 95 percent of the beds are occupied. Only a few hospitals still have capacity – but most of the hospitals are full and refusing to take more patients.”

Sajjad said the virus was proving “far more lethal” this time around. Authorities this week ordered the closure of educational institutes and banned indoor dining at restaurants.

The new outbreak has surprised Pakistan, where for onths many have been saying the pandemic was done. The government of Prime Minister Imran Khan, which never imposed the sort of sweeping lockdowns seen in wealthier countries, had boasted of controlling the virus but is again urging people to follow safeguards.

Compared to neighboring India, Pakistan dodged the worst of the pandemic’s first wave, something health experts have said was due partly to the young population and the fact many Pakistanis travel little around the country.

Pakistan has confirmed more than 382,000 cases including over 7,800 deaths since the virus arrived in late February. By contrast India, with a population five times the size, has recorded about 17 times more deaths.

Faisal Sultan, the prime minister’s special assistant on health, said the “death ratio” – the number of people with Covid-19 who die from the disease – was rising, and officials warn that more and more people are testing positive.

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