

Brazil shatters record with over 4,000 daily COVID deaths

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Brazil has recorded more than 366,000 coronavirus deaths, the second highest total in the world after the United States [Photo: Diego Vara/Reuters]

Brasilia, April 7 (RHC)-- For the first time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Brazil has recorded over 4,000 coronavirus deaths in a single day -- a new grim milestone for the country as President Jair Bolsonaro continues to reject public health restrictions.

The Brazilian health ministry said on Tuesday that 4,195 people had died due to the virus. The country has now recorded over 366,000 fatalities, according to a Johns Hopkins University tally -- second only to the United States.

“It’s a nuclear reactor that has set off a chain reaction and is out of control. It’s a biological Fukushima,” Miguel Nicolelis, a Brazilian doctor and professor at Duke University, told the Reuters news agency.

Brazilian hospitals across the country are being stretched to their limits as the rate of infections continues to climb. Younger people are falling ill and needing medical care as this wave of the pandemic has been marked by more easily transmissible strains of the virus.

Public health experts, doctors and even some local leaders are increasingly speaking out about the need to institute strict lockdowns to try to stem the surge. “We’re in a dreadful situation, and we’re not seeing effective measures by either state or federal governments” to respond, epidemiologist Ethel Maciel of Espirito Santo Federal University told the AFP news agency.

While less than 10 percent of Brazilians have received a first dose of COVID-19 vaccines so far, Maciel said “the only way to slow the extremely fast spread of the virus is an effective lockdown for at least 20 days.”

Meanwhile, Brazil’s far-right populist president still eschews public health restrictions such as mask-wearing and lockdowns, even amid mounting pressure on his government to account for the coronavirus crisis crippling the country.

Bolsonaro last month swore in a new health minister – his fourth since the pandemic began – and carried out a government reshuffle that saw him replace his foreign affairs, justice and defence ministers. He later also named new heads of the country’s army, navy and air force.

“Of course, probably economic activity will take a drop but it will be much, much less than the drop we suffered last year ... and much, much shorter,” Paulo Guedes said during an online event. But epidemiologists and other experts have put forward much more somber predictions.

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