

Brazil health secretary resigns amid coronavirus pandemic



Brasilia, April 16 (RHC)-- Brazil's Health Ministry has announced that Health Secretary Wanderson de Oliveira has resigned, as tensions between Health Minister Luiz Henrique Mandetta and far-right President Jair Bolsonaro over the handling of the coronavirus crisis escalate.

Mandetta told his team that he himself is likely to be fired by Bolsonaro this week, two people familiar with the matter told Reuters news agency, raising the prospect of political turmoil in the middle of the coronavirus outbreak.

Bolsonaro and Mandetta have been at odds over the handling of the coronavirus epidemic for weeks, as the president played down the gravity of the disease, touted unproven drugs and attacked governors over lockdown orders.

Brazil has more than 25,700 COVID-19 cases and 1,500 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University.

Mandetta emerged from relative obscurity with technocratic daily briefings presenting the latest science, stressing the need for social distancing measures and earning praise from across the political spectrum.

The Health Ministry's response to the epidemic was rated "good" or "great" by 76 percent of Brazilians surveyed by pollster Datafolha this month. However, Bolsonaro rated "good" with just 33 percent of those

surveyed.

Adding to tensions, Mandetta called for the government to speak with a unified voice, effectively calling out Bolsonaro for downplaying the threat ahead of what may be the two toughest months for the outbreak. He made the comments during a TV interview on Sunday. Vice President Hamilton Mourao said on Tuesday that Mandetta had "crossed the line" with his remarks.

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