

Spain coronavirus outbreak 'close to peaking': official

March 28 2020



This scanning electron microscope image shows SARS-CoV-2 (yellow)—also known as 2019-nCoV, the virus that causes COVID-19—isolated from a patient, emerging from the surface of cells (blue/pink) cultured in the lab. Credit: NIAID-RML

The coronavirus death toll in Spain surged over 5,600 on Saturday after a

record 832 people died in 24 hours, as officials said the epidemic appeared to be close to the peak.

Spain has the world's second-highest death toll after Italy with 5,690 fatalities.

But although Spain's latest figures showed a daily increase of more than 8,000 cases, raising the overall number to 72,248, the rate of new infections appeared to be slowing, with officials saying the epidemic could be nearing its peak.

"The increase is slowing or stabilising little-by-little," said Fernando Simon, the health ministry's emergencies coordinator, indicating the figures were "very very close" to peaking.

The surge in numbers has also brought the medical system to the brink of collapse, with the pressure on intensive care units a particular source of concern, he said.

"We still have a big problem with the saturation of our intensive care units," Simon said, indicating the worst crisis would probably take hold at the end of next week.

"The patients who are getting infected today are going to need a bed... within seven to 10 days," he said, indicating there would likely be a lag between reaching peak infections and the subsequent impact on intensive care units—which would take over a week.

"We really need a sharper drop (in infections)... so that we don't reach this capacity crisis" in the intensive care units.

Spain went into lockdown on March 14 but the numbers have continued to grow, with a worrying rise in cases among healthcare personnel.

Although there was no update on Friday's figure of 9,444 [medical staff](#) who had contracted the virus, Simon said it was a "larger number than that of most of the other affected countries," with nearly nine percent of them requiring hospitalisation.

New temporary morgue in Madrid

Madrid remains the worst-hit region, with 2,757 deaths and 21,520 infections, leaving hospitals and mortuaries on the brink of collapse, with officials working to open a second temporary morgue in an unused public building near the airport to house the dead.

An initial site was opened last week at an Olympic-sized skating rink at the Palacio de Hielo (Ice Palace) shopping centre.

With undertakers also overwhelmed, the government has authorised the army's involvement in the collection and transport of bodies for the duration of the state of emergency.

As the nation marked two weeks since the lockdown was put in place, Spain on Saturday received first a delivery of 1.2 million masks from China for [health workers](#) and those in the transport sector.

The delivery includes 387,000 surgical masks for healthcare personnel, 75,000 masks for the security forces and more than 725,000 for those in the transport sector, from bus drivers to airport staff and those working for the postal service, the government said.

Patricia Lacruz who heads the [health ministry's](#) pharmacology department said Spain had now signed contracts worth 628 million euros (\$700 million) to buy close to 700 million masks.

"We are working around the clock... to increase the availability of these

products within the national health system," she said.

Also on Saturday, Spain's military chief of staff confirmed troops had carried out deep-clean operations in more than 100 hospital, 16 prisons and 1,083 old people's homes.

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