

Vaccine trial resumes as virus continues grim march

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Clinical trials of one of the most advanced experimental COVID-19 vaccines resumed Saturday after a brief safety pause, as infection numbers continued to march upward in countries across the globe.

The world's hopes for a reprieve from the pandemic were dealt a blow

earlier in the week when pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca and Oxford University announced they had "voluntarily paused" their [vaccine trial](#) after a UK volunteer developed an unexplained illness.

But on Saturday the trial was given the all clear by British regulators to resume following a safety review. The company also announced it was resuming [clinical trials](#) in Brazil next Monday after being given the green light there as well.

The global death toll from the [coronavirus](#) has risen to 916,000 with 28.5 million infections, while France and the United Arab Emirates posted grim new milestones for daily infections on Saturday.

And with billions still suffering from the fallout of the pandemic, a worldwide race for a vaccine is underway, with nine companies already in late-stage Phase 3 trials.

Even during the pause, AstraZeneca said it remained hopeful that the vaccine could still be available "by the end of this year, early next year".

Oxford University said that "in large trials such as this, it is expected that some participants will become unwell and every case must be carefully evaluated".

Charlotte Summers, lecturer in intensive care medicine at Cambridge University, said the pause showed the researchers' commitment "to putting safety at the heart of their development programme."

"To tackle the global COVID-19 pandemic, we need to develop vaccines and therapies that people feel comfortable using, therefore it is vital to maintaining [public trust](#) that we stick to the evidence and do not draw conclusions before information is available," she said.

Backlash

That public trust will be crucial to convincing a public that is impatient for a vaccine—and in some corners sceptical.

Among the impatient is US President Donald Trump, who has been accused by rival Joe Biden of "undermining public confidence" by regularly raising the possibility that a vaccine will be ready before November's election.

The Republican president is under pressure as the US toll continues to rise, nearing 6.5 million cases on Saturday with more than 193,000 deaths—by far the most in either measure in the world.

Biden also called Trump "reckless" for holding a rally in the Nevada city of Reno even after the venue had to be changed because the event breached local COVID-19 restrictions. Television images of the rally Saturday showed a packed outdoors crowd, with few wearing [face masks](#)

Some of those potentially sceptical about a vaccine meanwhile turned out in numerous German cities and Poland's capital Warsaw on Saturday, protesting against anti-coronavirus measures and often defying mask-wearing rules.

The movement is made up of a number of different groups, from self-declared "free thinkers" to anti-[vaccine](#) campaigners, conspiracy theorists and far-right activists.

France, UAE milestones

There are signs of a resurgence of the virus in numerous countries that lifted many coronavirus measures after beating back the first wave of

infections months ago.

France reported 10,000 new infections on Saturday, the country's highest daily number since launching wide-scale testing.

The milestone came a day after Prime Minister Jean Castex declined to announce any new major restrictions despite a "clear worsening" in the country's outbreak.

"We have to succeed in living with this virus, without returning to the idea of a generalised lockdown," Castex said.

Another country to hit a daily milestone on Saturday was the United Arab Emirates, which recorded more than 1,000 new coronavirus cases for the first time.

In Spain, which this week became the first EU country to pass half a million infections, a case was detected among Princess Leonor's classmates.

The 14-year-old heiress to the Spanish throne—who only returned to school in Madrid on Wednesday—will now have to observe a two-week quarantine.

The uncle of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, businessman Mohamad Makhlof, died from COVID-19 on Saturday, two close sources told AFP.

And in Latin America, which this week passed the milestone of eight million virus cases, worst-hit Brazil charted more than 131,000 deaths from COVID-19 as of Saturday, the second-highest in the world behind the US.

Latvia meanwhile reinstated a compulsory 14-day quarantine for arrivals from neighbouring Estonia due to an upsurge in cases there.

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