

# India's virus cases cross 10 million as new infections dip

December 19 2020, by Ashok Sharma

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People wearing face masks use an escalator in a mall in Mumbai, India, Friday, Dec. 18, 2020. (AP Photo/Rafiq Maqbool)

India's confirmed coronavirus cases have crossed 10 million with new infections dipping to their lowest levels in three months, as the country prepares for a massive COVID-19 vaccination in the new year.

Additional cases in the past 24 hours dropped to 25,152 from a peak of nearly 100,000 in mid-September. The epidemic has infected nearly 1% of India's more than 1.3 billion people, second to the worst-hit United States.

The Health Ministry on Saturday also reported 347 deaths in the past 24 hours, taking total fatalities to 145,136.

Dr. Randeep Guleria, a government health expert, said India is keeping its fingers crossed as the cases tend to increase in winter months.

"If we can sustain our declining trend for the next two to three months, we should be able to start the vaccination program and start moving away from the pandemic," Guleria told The Associated Press.

India is home to some of the world's biggest vaccine-makers and there are five [vaccine candidates](#) under different phases of trial in the country.

The Serum Institute of India, the world's largest vaccine-maker, is licensed to produce the Oxford University-AstraZeneca shots. India's Bharat Biotech vaccine also is a front-runner, and the two vaccines are expected to get authorization for emergency use within weeks, said Guleria.

A health worker takes a nasal swab sample to test for COVID-19 inside a mobile testing van in New Delhi, India, Saturday, Dec. 19, 2020. India's confirmed coronavirus cases have crossed 10 million with new infections dipping to their lowest levels in three months, as the country prepares for a massive COVID-19 vaccination in the new year. (AP Photo/Manish Swarup)

An exile Tibetan Buddhist monk wearing a mask as precaution against the coronavirus rotates a prayer wheel in Dharmsala, India, Friday, Dec. 18, 2020. (AP Photo/Ashwini Bhatia)

A health worker walks past a mobile testing van meant for taking samples to test for COVID-19 in New Delhi, India, Saturday, Dec. 19, 2020. India's confirmed coronavirus cases have crossed 10 million with new infections dipping to their lowest levels in three months, as the country prepares for a massive COVID-19 vaccination in the new year. (AP Photo/Manish Swarup)

Protective gloves hang at a mobile testing van for taking samples to test for COVID-19 in New Delhi, India, Saturday, Dec. 19, 2020. India's confirmed coronavirus cases have crossed 10 million with new infections dipping to their lowest levels in three months, as the country prepares for a massive COVID-19 vaccination in the new year. (AP Photo/Manish Swarup)

India aims to provide vaccines to 250 million people by July 2021. The government is planning to receive 450 million to 500 million doses, the Health Ministry said.

The first group will include health care and front-line workers. The second group to receive the COVID 19 [vaccine](#) will be people over 50 years of age and those under 50 with comorbid conditions, it said.

The pace of new cases has slowed down. It took India 12 days to get from 5 million to 6 million cases, but 22 days to go from 8 million to 9 million, and 29 days to hit 10 million.

India's economy contracted by 7.5% in the July-September quarter following a record slump of 23.9% in the previous three months, pushing the country into a recession for the first time in its history. With millions becoming jobless, the Indian government is continuing to relax harsh lockdown restrictions that were imposed in late March.

A large number of offices, shops, businesses, liquor stores, bars and restaurants have reopened. Restricted domestic and international evacuation flights are being operated along with train services. Schools remain closed.

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