

Haiti says virus infections have peaked

16 June 2020



Two men wear masks as they walk in the streets of downtown Port-au-Prince on March 26, 2020. When the novel coronavirus first appeared in Haiti authorities and humanitarian experts panicked, worried about the country's decrepit health system—but health officials say the virus may have already passed its peak

Haitian health officials said Monday that COVID-19 infections had peaked and the number of cases being detected was going down, leading them to voice cautious hope the epidemic might not be as bad as some of the more alarming predictions had led them to believe.

"We haven't had as many deaths or serious cases as we had been expecting," said Dr Patrick Dely, director of epidemiology at the National Laboratory.

"We think the virus, which has caused so much damage in other countries, is not behaving the same way here," he said. "The question now is why: that is what we are researching."

Since the first cases were detected on March 19, Haiti has only had 4,309 people test positive for the new [coronavirus](#), of whom 73 have died, according to the last figures published on Sunday.

The authorities admit however that the statistics do

not represent the full scope of the disease in the country, given the low [number](#) of tests carried out. But they insisted nevertheless that the figures allowed them to assess the disease's progress across the country.

"We had expected to reach the peak during the 27th week of the epidemic," which would have been the last week of June, "yet, on the basis of our observations, from the 22nd week, at the end of May, we saw a downward tendency in the numbers we are counting," said Dr Dely.

"We cannot be complacent because we don't know what changes may arise as we speak. Will we see another wave? We cannot know how the disease is going to behave," he said, noting that Haiti was still in "a period of strong transmission."

In a country of 11.2 million people, scientists predict a best-case scenario of around 2,000 deaths during the [epidemic](#), while gloomier predictions put the final toll closer to 20,000.

Many Haitians have dismissed the seriousness of the [disease](#), shrugging it off as a "small fever" and refusing to get tested, especially in the capital Port-au-Prince.

Even as the airports, schools and the border with the Dominican Republic have been closed since March 19, most day-to-day activities have carried on across the country.

Staying at home is not an option for the vast majority of Haitians, who depend on the informal economy for their survival.

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