

India virus cases hit 1.5 million, but slum study casts doubt on official data

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Coronavirus infections in India passed 1.5 million and deaths neared 35,000 on Wednesday, but test results in Mumbai cast further doubt on official data in the world's second-most populous nation.

Even as case numbers soar and more areas impose lockdowns, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said this week India was in a "better position than other countries", and winning international praise.

The health ministry website—which no longer includes total infections as the government puts more emphasis on recoveries—on Wednesday reported almost 50,000 new infections and 768 more deaths.

The South Asian giant, home to some of the world's most crowded cities and where health-care spending per capita is among the world's lowest, passed one million cases only 12 days earlier.

But many experts have said India is not testing enough people, and that many [coronavirus](#)-linked deaths are not being recorded as such.

A study released Tuesday that tested for coronavirus antibodies reported some 57 percent of people in Mumbai's teeming slums have had the [infection](#)—far more than official data suggests.

The Tata Institute of Fundamental Research's Ullas S. Kolthur, who was involved in carrying out the survey, said he was surprised by the results.

"At least in the slums, we think it is largely because social distancing wouldn't work simply because of the population density," Kolthur told AFP.

Last week a similar study indicated that almost a quarter of people in the capital, New Delhi, have had the virus—almost 40 times the official total.

There are, however, also doubts about the accuracy of such tests, since other coronaviruses—not just the novel COVID-19—may also produce antibodies that could give a false positive result.

The Mumbai survey also covered a relatively small sample of around 7,000 people.

India now has the third-highest number of cases in the world behind the United States and Brazil, although the official number of deaths in the South Asian nation is far lower.

As a proportion of its population, India also lags behind, with only 1,110 cases per million population compared to 13,148 for the United States, according to an AFP tally.

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