

Fiji fears virus 'tsunami' after outbreak found to be Indian variant

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A COVID-19 outbreak that forced Fiji's capital into lockdown after the island nation avoided transmission for a year was confirmed as the Indian variant Tuesday, with health officials saying they feared a "tsunami" of cases.

The Pacific country had largely dodged community transmission before a cluster emerged this month centred on a quarantine facility in Nadi, the city that is home to Fiji's international airport.

The permanent secretary for health and [medical services](#), James Fong, said six new cases had emerged in quarantine facilities on Tuesday and events in India showed the threat posed by the strain could not be underestimated.

"We cannot let that nightmare happen in Fiji," he said in a televised address.

"We still have time to stop it happening but a single misstep will bring about the same COVID tsunami that our friends in India, Brazil, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States are enduring."

Fiji has largely contained the virus through strict isolation measures and [border controls](#), recording 109 cases and just two deaths in a population of 930,000.

There are currently 42 active cases, 18 of them detected at the border and 24 locally transmitted.

The cluster began when a soldier contracted the virus at a quarantine facility and transmitted it to his wife, who then exposed up to 500 people at a funeral.

Fong said there was evidence that soldiers who had returned from overseas deployments had broken quarantine rules by mixing with each other when they should have been in isolation.

"This is unacceptable," he said, adding that the military was investigating what had happened.

The capital Suva is in lockdown, along with Nadi and Lautoka, Fiji's second largest city.

Authorities on Tuesday banned inter-island travel, while national carrier Fiji Airways has suspended all international and domestic passenger flights.

The emergence of community transmission is a blow for Fiji's hopes of opening quarantine-free travel bubbles with Australia and New Zealand, both major sources of international tourists before the pandemic.

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