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## Covid-19 (Bangladesh): Virus deaths surge, new cases too

Thursday 21 May 2020, by [RAHMAN KHAN Mahbubur](#) (Date first published: 19 May 2020).

**21 more die, 1,602 test positive in 24 hrs; experts for further expansion of testing facilities, change in govt strategy.**



The country yesterday saw the highest number of deaths from the novel coronavirus — 21 in a single day — with a record 1,602 positive cases.

With this, the death toll now stands at 349 and the number of Covid-19 cases rises to 23,836.

However, experts fear that the actual number of infected people is much higher than that, and the hidden Covid-19 cases continue to spread the virus. If the government fails to trace them, the situation will deteriorate further.

“Many are failing to avail themselves of the testing facility. On the other hand, the testing capacity is limited, which is why a good number of infected people have remained untraced,” said Prof Muzaherul Huq, former regional director (Southeast Asia) of World Health Organisation.

Testing facilities should be expanded to district and upazila level, he said.

Professor Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director (disease control) at the health and family welfare ministry, also gave similar opinion.

According to official data, more than 10,000 people got infected with the deadly virus over the last nine days. One in every seven suspected cases tested positive for Covid-19 during this period.

The first coronavirus case was detected in the country on March 8.

Talking to this newspaper on Thursday, Dr Liaquat Ali, a medical scientist and member of an expert committee, said, “We submitted a report to the DGHS saying the Covid-19 outbreak may reach its peak in the third or fourth week of this month and the situation would remain unchanged for almost two weeks, or until the first week of June.”

The government formed the eight-member committee in late March to supervise, monitor and support its efforts to combat the deadly virus.

On May 9, the number of novel coronavirus cases was 636. It rose to 887 the following day, and crossed 1,000-mark a day later.

Amid the rise in Covid-19 cases, some shopping malls and clothing stores reopened on May 10 following a government decision. Since then, movement of people as well as traffic on roads have increased.

“Obviously, the relaxation of restrictions is one of the main reasons behind the rise in Covid-19 cases,” said Muzaherul.

Since May 10, the health department has tested 58,489 samples and found 8,498 of those positive for the virus.

But in terms of testing coverage, Bangladesh still lags behind several countries in South Asia.

Official data shows Bangladesh has so far been able to test only 1,143 out of every one million people in the country. The number is 1,500 in neighbouring India and 1,600 in Pakistan.

And 122 out of every one million people in Bangladesh have been infected with the virus, and it saw two deaths per million people.

On the other hand, one-fifth of the infected people have so far recovered from the disease.

## **HIGH NUMBER OF CASES IN CAPITAL**

The capital has seen a steady rise in Covid-19 cases over the last few weeks.

The number of infected people in the city stood at 9,565 yesterday, according to the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research.

The number was 6,162 on May 08 and 3,973 on May 01.

At an online briefing yesterday, Prof Dr Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of the Directorate General of Health Services, said that of the dead, 12 were from Dhaka, seven from Chattogram, one from Sylhet and the other from Rajshahi.

So far 4,585 patients have recovered from the disease, and the recovery rate was 19.21 percent, added the DGHS official.

## **EXPERTS’ ADVICE**

Experts say the government should bring changes in its strategy to fight Covid-19 and give district civil surgeons more responsibility for tackling the deadly virus in their areas.

“Since they [civil surgeons] are health experts, they know what steps are required. In this battle, they will need support from deputy commissioners and superintendents of police,” said Muzaherul.

He suggested that the government should divide the country into three zones — green, yellow and red. The districts having less than a hundred Covid-19 cases each will be put in the green zone, the ones with 100-300 cases in the yellow zone and those with more than 300 cases in the red zone.

The infected people in all the three zones would be kept at institutional facilities and their movement would be restricted, he mentioned.

In the green zone, restrictions on academic and economic activities would be relaxed, whereas the red zone will be kept under complete lockdown, and markets will be kept open for only three hours a day, he said.

In case of the yellow zone, the areas where Covid-19 cases were detected would be under lockdown, but other areas would see a relaxation of restrictions, added Muzaherul.

**Mahbubur Rahman Khan**

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**P.S.**

• The Daily Star. 12:00 AM, May 19, 2020 / LAST MODIFIED: 01:02 AM, May 19, 2020:  
<https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/news/virus-deaths-surge-new-cases-too-1903933>