

# Covid-19 (Brazil): Coronavirus Is Killing Isolated Indigenous Peoples at a Staggering Rate

Tuesday 26 May 2020, by [GILBERT David](#) (Date first published: 25 May 2020).

**The mortality rate among indigenous people is twice that of the rest of the population.**

*Cover: A woman wearing a mask that reads in Portuguese "Indigenous Lives Matter," cries during the funeral of Chief Messias Martins Moreira, 53, of the Kokama ethnic group, who died of Covid-19, at Parque das Tribos in Manaus, Amazonas state, Brazil, Thursday, May 14, 2020. (AP Photo/Edmar Barros)*

COVID-19 is hitting Brazil's indigenous population twice as hard as the rest of the population, with a mortality rate of over 12 percent.

The startling statistic comes from the advocacy group Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (APIB) which is tracking the number of cases and deaths among the country's 900,000 indigenous people.

According to APIB's latest figures, 125 indigenous people have died from coronavirus, out of 980 confirmed cases. The mortality rate of 12.4 percent is almost double the national mortality rate of 6.4 percent.

"The virus is reaching indigenous territories across Brazil with frightening speed," APIB said in a statement on Friday, pointing out that 40 of the country's 300 separate indigenous groups are thought to have been infected already.

Doctors have been trying to reach communities living in isolated parts of the Brazilian rainforests, using medevac planes.



"The number of COVID-19 patients has increased a lot," Edson Santos Rodrigues, a pediatric doctor, told Reuters. "We are flying more planes [up the rivers]; it's the last opportunity to save their

lives. [1]"

But critics have blasted the government's response to the growing crisis among indigenous peoples.

The National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), the government agency responsible for protecting native people, is "hardly doing anything to coordinate a response to a crisis that could decimate ethnic groups," according to four people who work closely with indigenous communities who spoke to AP last week.

Brazil is now the world's second worst-hit country, registering over 22,000 deaths and more than 360,000 cases so far. But many experts believe a lack of testing could mean the real figures are up to 15 times higher than reported [2].

On Sunday the White House announced that it would be imposing travel restrictions on people coming from the South American country. The restrictions, which prevent non-Americans who have been to Brazil in the last two weeks from traveling to the U.S., will come into effect on May 28.

The news is a blow to populist Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who, like U.S. President Donald Trump, has repeatedly downplayed the threat from coronavirus, played up unproven drugs like hydroxychloroquine, and pushed for the country's economy to remain open.

**David Gilbert**

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**P.S.**

• VICE News. May 25 2020, 3:16pm:  
[https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/ep4ngz/coronavirus-is-killing-brazils-isolated-indigenous-peoples-at-a-staggering-rate?utm\\_campaign=sharebutton](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/ep4ngz/coronavirus-is-killing-brazils-isolated-indigenous-peoples-at-a-staggering-rate?utm_campaign=sharebutton)

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**Footnotes**

[1] <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/fears-for-brazil-s-indigenous-people-as-coronavirus-deaths-spike>

[2] [https://www.vice.com/en\\_au/article/m7jjby/bodies-pile-up-why-brazil-is-about-to-become-the-next-coronavirus-epicenter](https://www.vice.com/en_au/article/m7jjby/bodies-pile-up-why-brazil-is-about-to-become-the-next-coronavirus-epicenter)