

Burma

More Than Half of Myanmar's Chin State Under COVID Lockdown

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More than half of Chin State in northwestern Myanmar has been locked down after the military regime imposed stay-at-home orders for four more townships in the state due to the COVID-19 spike.

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After seeing the rapid spread of coronavirus in the region, the junta-controlled Ministry of Health and Sports (MOHS) on Friday imposed stay-at-home orders upon four Chin State townships: Hakha, Tedim, Falam and Thantlang.

On May 28, Tonzang Township of Chin State was also placed under stay-at-home orders due to the COVID-19 spike. As of Friday, five out of a total of nine townships in the state have been locked down. Chin State is one of Myanmar's least developed regions.

Under the stay-at-home order, only government staff and employees of companies and factories are allowed to go work. Only one person from each household is allowed to go shopping.

Residents must ask for official permission if they have to leave their homes on urgent matters or if more than one person has to leave home, said MOHS.

Since May 31, about 30 to more than 50 COVID-19 cases were reported in two Chin State townships—Tonzang and Falam.

Tonzang Township bordering India, is seeing the rapid spread of coronavirus, reporting 20 to 52 cases daily in recent days.

Amid the COVID-19 spike, the township is facing a lack of medicine and ventilators for COVID-19 patients, said Dr. Htan Shin Khaing, head of the Tonzang Township Health Department.

"We don't even have vitamin supplements to give to the patients. The medicines we requested from the health ministry have not arrived due to instability," he said.

In the last six days, the COVID-19 death toll reached six in the township after three more patients died in a single day on Thursday and a 36-year-old COVID-19 patient died on Saturday.

Meanwhile, Myanmar has seen an outbreak of COVID-19 in Sagaing Region's Kale Township, which has been placed under stay-at-home orders on Wednesday after reporting 34 COVID-19 cases in a single day.

On Friday alone, about six people died of COVID-19 in the township.

Myanmar reported 212 new cases of COVID-19 cases across the country on Friday, the largest jump in cases since the military coup.

The previous biggest rise in Myanmar's COVID-19 tally was 122, which was reported on Thursday.

As of Friday, Myanmar had reported a total of 144,157 COVID-19 cases including 3,221 deaths and 132,412 people who have recovered.

Myanmar has seen a decline in daily cases since December last year.

Around 400-500 new COVID-19 cases were being reported per day in December, down from a peak of more than 1,400 daily cases. The then ruling NLD government had also planned to start the nationwide COVID-19 vaccination in the first week on February 2021.

However, the vaccination plan was interrupted after the military regime seized state power from the NLD government on Feb. 1.

Also, the country's public health care system has collapsed after thousands of health care workers went on strike to protest the military regime.

Myanmar has seen increasing numbers of COVID-19 again since late May. The military regime has eased COVID-related restrictions including reopening religious sites, and allowing interstate visits among others since they came to power in February. On June 1, they opened schools across the country.

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<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/more-than-half-of-myanmars-chin-state-under-covid-lockdown.html>

COVID-19 Claims Three More Lives in Myanmar-India Border Town

Three more people died of COVID-19 in the town of Cikha in Chin State's Tonzang Township on Thursday, according to the township's Public Health Department.

167 COVID-19 cases resulting in five deaths have been reported in Tonzang since last Sunday. The township borders India, where a new variant of coronavirus has been circulating nationwide, prompting fears that it has spread into Myanmar.

The victims were two men, aged 70 and 62, and a 54-year-old woman. They died of COVID-19-inflicted lung failure. Two of the patients had no underlying health conditions, but the other had

chronic lung problems and high blood pressure, according to the head of Cikha's town health department, Dr. Htan Shin Khaing.

One of the male patients was admitted to Cikha hospital on May 21 and the other two were admitted on May 26.

COVID-19 cases have also spiked in Tamu Township, which also shares a frontier with India, and Kalaymyo in neighbouring Sagaing Region. Myanmar's military regime has imposed stay-at-home orders on Tonzang, Tamu and Kalaymyo townships.

A total of 87 people died of COVID-19 between the junta's Feb. 1 coup and June 2, according to regime-controlled television.

Myanmar started to see a gradual decline in COVID-19 infections last December, with a few hundred cases being reported per day, down from a daily peak of 1,400 in previous months.

However, far fewer tests have been carried out following the coup as healthcare workers are refusing to work for the regime, resulting in only dozens of new infections being reported daily.

Since May 27, hundreds of new cases have been reported in Yangon, Bago, Ayeyarwady, Mandalay, Sagaing and Tanintharyi regions and Shan, Chin, Mon, Rakhine and Karen states.

Myanmar recorded 143,823 COVID-19 cases, with 3,218 deaths and 132,388 people recovering, from Mar. 23 last year to June 2 this year, according to the junta-controlled Ministry of Health and Sports.

- The Irrawaddy 4 June 2021:

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/covid-19-claims-three-more-lives-in-myanmar-india-border-town.html>

Interview: 'Tonzang is Seeing a COVID-19 Outbreak': Township Health Chief

COVID-19 infections have resurfaced in Myanmar while the health care system is on the verge of collapse amid post-coup turmoil. Tonzang Township in Chin State on the Indian border has seen a spike in COVID-19 cases.

A total of 167 COVID-19 cases were reported in Tonzang by Wednesday with five deaths between May 30 and Thursday. The military regime has imposed stay-at-home orders upon three towns — Tamu and Kale in Sagaing Region and Tonzang.

Tonzang Township Health Department head Dr. Htan Shin Khaing talked to The Irrawaddy about the COVID-19 situation in the township.

How is the COVID-19 crisis in Tonzang?

There were 52 new cases on June 2. It was the highest daily rise in Tonzang. There were only around 20 cases in previous days.

How did infections happen?

We believe it has spread from India.

What are the difficulties in providing treatment?

We don't even have vitamin supplements to give to patients. The medicines we requested from the health ministry have not arrived due to the instability. We can only ask patients to buy medicines from private pharmacies. Doctors collectively contribute and buy some medicines for patients. But we can't afford to buy vitamin supplements for them. They are expensive. We have no medicines at the hospital.

How is the department handling the oxygen requirements of COVID-19 patients?

Some donors have supplied oxygen. We have not yet run out. But I am afraid supplies will not last long if the cases increase. And we don't have ventilators for emergency cases. No donors have donated a ventilator.

Does your department have to rely on individual donors rather than the health ministry?

The ministry has sent 3,000 testing kits. We have enough kits. We have asked for medicines.

What happened to people who have died in Tonzang from COVID-19?

People with weak immunity, including pregnant women, are more vulnerable and struggle to resist COVID-19. The new variant is stronger than the previous strains, which had little impact on people with normal immune systems. But most of those infected with the new variant are bedridden after one or two days. They are exhausted and struggle to leave their beds even if they don't have breathing problems.

All the patients lose their sense of smell. Cases appeared in early May. As health workers have joined the civil disobedience movement, they tried home remedies and over-the-counter drugs. But they didn't get better so they came to the hospital. We carried out COVID-19 tests when the hospital became full.

What proportion of people tested positive for COVID-19?

Around 28 to 30 percent tested positive.

Are you worried?

It is best to stay indoors. Only one member of each household should go out to buy food. And they must wear masks, hats and aprons when outside and remove them outside before entering their homes. Otherwise, there is a real risk of cases spreading across the township. Tonzang is seeing a COVID-19 outbreak and it will become difficult to control.

People experiencing symptoms usually take medicines at home and come to the hospital for a COVID-19 test if they don't recover. Previously, we had to persuade them to come for a test but now they come voluntarily. They are scared.

Can the hospital cope with all the patients?

No, we can't treat them all. We can't estimate how many more patients there will be. We have turned the hospital into a COVID-19 center and no longer accept other patients suffering from other

problems. And we have opened a fever clinic for outpatients with COVID-19 symptoms.

If they test positive, we take them to a quarantine center which is run by volunteers. Only those who need oxygen are admitted to the hospital and have contact with doctors. We give volunteers at the quarantine center instructions over the phone. A doctor visits the center each day. We are short of health staff. Between 60 to 70 percent of staff are on strike.

What is your plan to deal with COVID-19 without enough staff and medicines?

We need more health staff and medicines. The situation is alarming. Other townships should take care. Everyone should take COVID-19 preventative measures, especially because of the [post-coup] turmoil.

How many quarantine centers are open?

There is only one quarantine center but, if necessary, we will have to use churches and gyms.

Can you describe the treatment given to the pregnant woman who died in late May?

She was eight months' pregnant. There was no doctor when she arrived at the hospital. Doctors had fled for various reasons. Only nurses provided her treatment. Volunteer doctors arrived two days later. If there was a specialist, we might have been able to save the baby. Her lungs were badly swollen and she died on May 30 after being admitted on May 28.

What else do you want to say?

Most of the victims died within three days after testing positive. This variant is different from previous ones and strong. Young people should be relieved if they are sick for five to six days with a sore throat. They will feel too tired to do anything for two weeks even after recovery. Those who died do not survive that long. They died two to three days after the virus reached their lungs. It is frightening and people should exercise utmost caution.

The Irrawaddy

• The Irrawaddy 4 June 2021:

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/in-person/interview/tonzang-is-seeing-a-covid-19-outbreak-township-health-chief.html>

Myanmar Junta Locks Down Kalaymyo as COVID-19 Cases Spike

The military regime imposed a stay-at-home order on another township in Sagaing Region on Wednesday, as COVID-19 cases continue to spike in northwest Myanmar.

Residents of Kalaymyo, also known as Kalay and Kale, were ordered to stay in their homes a day after Myanmar reported the country's largest daily rise in COVID-19 cases since February with 122 new cases. 13 of those were recorded in Kalay Township.

Under the stay-at home order, everyone except government staff and employees of companies and

factories has to stay inside, said the junta-controlled Ministry of Health and Sports (MOHS). Residents must ask for official permission if they have to leave their homes on urgent matters or if more than one person has to leave the home.

Residents are also required to wear face masks when outside. The MOHS warned that people who fail to comply with the order will face prosecution.

Last Friday, Tamu Township in Sagaing Region and Tonzang Township in Chin State were also placed under stay-at-home orders after reporting a large number of COVID-19 infections.

MOHS officials said that they have been facing a rapid increase in COVID-19 cases in Sagaing Region and Tonzang and Falam townships in Chin State, which borders India. Tonzang Township reported 52 of the 122 coronavirus cases recorded on Tuesday.

On Thursday, a 54-year-old woman and a 51-year-old man died of COVID-19 while they were being treated at a hospital in the town of Cikha in Tonzang Township.

A 74-year-old and a 38-year-old pregnant woman who were being treated at the same hospital have also died of COVID-19 in the last five days.

Dr. Daw Khin Khin Gyi, the director of the MOHS's Emerging Infectious Disease Epidemiology Unit, told the Irrawaddy on Wednesday that they are carrying out tests to determine which form of COVID-19 is spreading in Sagaing Region and Chin State.

She added that they suspect that the new coronavirus variant found in India has now spread across the border into Myanmar.

72 people across Myanmar tested positive for COVID-19 on Wednesday, although this is almost certainly an underestimate of the true infection rate as only around 1,600 COVID-19 tests were performed nationwide.

As of Wednesday, Myanmar had reported a total of 143,823 COVID-19 cases, including 3,218 fatalities and 132,388 people who have recovered.

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- The Irrawaddy 3 June 2021:

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-locks-down-kalaymyo-as-covid-19-cases-spik e.html>

Myanmar Reports Record Rise in COVID-19 Cases Since February

Myanmar reported 122 new cases of COVID-19 on Tuesday, the largest daily jump in cases in the last three months.

The previous biggest rise in Myanmar's COVID-19 tally was 96, which was reported last Thursday. Around 11 to 35 new COVID-19 cases were reported daily from Feb. 6 to May. 26.

As of Tuesday, Myanmar had reported a total of 143,751 COVID-19 cases, including 3,217 fatalities and 132,360 people recovered, according to the junta-controlled Ministry of Health and Sports (MOHS).

Dr. Daw Khin Khin Gyi, the director of the MOHS's Emerging Infectious Disease Epidemiology Unit, told the Irrawaddy on Wednesday that more than 50 of the 122 new COVID-19 cases were reported in Chin State's Tonzang Township and the town of Cikha, which border India.

Since Friday, the township has been placed under a stay-at-home order after more than a dozen people tested positive for COVID-19 at the Tonzang Public Hospital and the hospital in Cikha last Thursday.

"We found more cases there because there were more people who had been in contact with the COVID-19 patients," said Dr. Daw Khin Khin Gyi.

She added that they are trying their best to control the transmission of COVID-19 in Tonzang Township. Of the 11 COVID-19 cases found in Cikha, seven patients are in serious condition.

A 74-year-old COVID-19 patient who was being treated at Cikha's hospital died on Tuesday, while a 38-year-old pregnant woman died from the coronavirus on Sunday in the same hospital.

The military regime has also imposed a stay-at-home order on Tamu Township, Sagaing Region, which also borders India, following a spike in COVID-19 cases there.

The MOHS is carrying out tests to determine which form of COVID-19 is spreading in Sagaing Region and Chin State, said Dr. Daw Khin Khin Gyi. It is suspected that the new coronavirus variant found in India has now spread across the border into Myanmar.

Since the junta's Feb. 1 coup, the MOHS has been conducting only around 1,500 to 2,000 COVID-19 tests per day because thousands of healthcare workers are refusing to work for the junta.

Under the ousted civilian government, around 16,000 to 18,000 swab tests were carried out daily in January.

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- The Irrawaddy 2 June 2021:

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-reports-record-rise-in-covid-19-cases-since-february.htm>
