

Health workers in NY decry ‘abysmal’ lack of protection

AFP, New York

Medical staff in America’s coronavirus hotbed New York are struggling with long hours and a dire need for protective equipment -- and as infections surge, they increasingly fear for their own safety.

Doctors and nurses are working around the clock caring for patients hit by the fast-spreading infection, risking their lives on the front lines of the global crisis.

The same week the United States became the new epicentre of the pandemic -- posting over 100,000 confirmed cases of infection, including more than 1,500 deaths -- Kious Kelly, a nurse manager at a Manhattan hospital, succumbed to a fatal case of Covid-19.

The death of the 48-year-old male nurse crystallised fears of many medical workers who’ve lamented severe shortages of necessary supplies, including plastic protective gowns and hospital-grade masks.

“It’s abysmal,” said Andrew, a psychiatry resident in a New York hospital who spoke on condition his name be changed.

He is now quarantined at home with a likely case of the virus himself.

“There’s not enough money, there aren’t enough tests, there’s not enough personal protective equipment for people who are dealing with this -- not just the doctors, but nurses, ancillary staff, janitors -- everyone in the hospital who are getting huge exposure to the virus,” the resident told AFP in an interview punctuated by coughs.

Diana Torres, a former colleague of the late Kelly, said hospital staff are “devastated” that “he paid the ultimate price.”

The mother of three told AFP there are units of the hospital filled to the brim with coronavirus patients.



(Clockwise from left) A handout picture, released by the office of the British prime minister yesterday, shows military and contractors building the Nightingale Hospital for novel coronavirus Covid-19 patients at the Excel centre in east London. A military personnel disinfects his colleague's boots outside the church of San Giuseppe in Seriate, Italy. A medical worker unpacks a snorkelling mask, to be used with 3D-printed respiratory valves fittings at the Erasme Hospital in Brussels, during a national lockdown in Belgium.



PHOTO: AFP

Use ‘industrial might’ WHO chief urges G20 nations to ramp up production of PPE amid ‘chronic’ global shortage

AFP, Geneva

The lack of protective gear for health workers is proving a dire threat to attempts to beat back the Covid-19 pandemic, the World Health Organization warned Friday.

The WHO urged industrial powerhouse countries to ramp up production of personal protective equipment (PPE) as the global body warned that the battle against the new coronavirus was only just beginning.

“The chronic global shortage of personal protective equipment is now one of the most urgent threats to our collective ability to save lives,” WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a virtual news conference in Geneva.

“When health workers are at risk, we’re all at risk,” he said.

“This problem can only be solved with international cooperation and solidarity,” said Tedros, adding that health workers in poorer countries deserved the same protection as those in wealthier states.

Tedros said the WHO had shipped almost two million individual PPE items to 74 countries and was preparing to send a similar amount to a further 60 nations.

He said he had urged the G20 countries to use

their “industrial might and innovation” to produce and distribute the tools needed to save more lives.

“We must also make a promise to future generations, saying: ‘never again’,” Tedros added.

“Viral outbreaks are a fact of life. How much damage they do is something we can influence,” he said.

The new coronavirus pandemic has killed more than 25,000 people, with Europe accounting for most of the deaths, according to an AFP tally based on official statistics.

Around 550,000 cases have been registered around the world since the outbreak began in China late last year.

Tedros said that more than 100,000 people had now had the virus and recovered.

He added: “We’re only at the beginning of this fight. We need to stay calm, stay united and work together.”

Mindful that a safe, properly-tested, preventative vaccine remained at least 12 to 18 months away, Tedros said that in the meantime, trials were under way to find therapeutics that could help treat those already suffering from the virus.

He said that in Norway and Spain, the first patients were about to enrol in the WHO’s so-called solidarity trial, which will compare the safety and effectiveness of four different drugs or drug combinations.



194 new cases surface in India Modi thanks nurse for her efforts

NDTV ONLINE

India saw the highest jump in Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours with 194 patients testing positive for the highly contagious illness in different parts of the country, a health ministry official said yesterday.

This includes two deaths which were reported since Friday, the official said.

The government has been pre-emptive and graded in its response to arrest spread of deadly coronavirus. The official also said that social-distancing and the nationwide lockdown can play an important role in breaking chain of transmission. “Rigorous contact-tracing is underway,” the official added.

Doctors across country were being trained on the management of the patients with the help of AIIMS, Delhi. “The Health Minister inaugurated 24x7 national tele-medicine facility at AIIMS for better Covid-19 management,” the official said. “We are constantly engaged in discussion with States for earmarking dedicated Covid-19 hospitals,” the official said.

Talking about the testing process, a ICMR official said that all patients who are having severe acute respiratory illness are being tested for the virus. Forty-four private laboratories have been given the approval for coronavirus testing so far.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called up a nurse from Naidu Hospital, which has been treating Covid-19 patients, and applauded the work done by the hospital staff to fight the pandemic, a civic official said yesterday.

Afghan govt unveils team to start Taliban talks

The Afghan government has finalised a 21-member team -- including five women -- who will negotiate with the Taliban in upcoming talks aimed at ending Afghanistan’s 18-year-old conflict, officials said Friday. The move is a crucial step in bringing the warring parties to the table and getting a floundering, US-led peace process back on track. Under a deal signed by the US and the Taliban last month, the insurgents agreed to commit to starting talks with the Afghan government and discuss a possible ceasefire. Up until now, the Taliban has refused to meet with the administration of President Ashraf Ghani, calling him an American stooge.

Taiwan FM invites US journos expelled by China

American journalists expelled by China are welcome to set up shop in Taiwan, foreign minister Joseph Wu said yesterday, as the democratic island burnishes its credentials as a regional free speech haven. Beijing ordered the expulsion of 13 journalists from the New York Times, Washington Post and Wall Street Journal earlier this month as part of a widening spat over media freedoms with the United States. The move marked the biggest crackdown on the foreign press in China in recent decades. It also rattled nerves in Hong Kong because Beijing’s order said the expelled reporters would not be allowed to work there, despite the semi-autonomous city supposedly controlling its own immigration decisions.



Israel strikes Hamas after rocket fired from Gaza

Israel struck Hamas sites in the Gaza Strip late Friday in response to a rocket fired from the Palestinian enclave, Israel’s military said. The army said the rocket was fired on Friday evening without giving further details. Local media reported that the rocket landed in open ground without injuring anyone, though thousands of residents of southern Israel rushed to bomb shelters. “In response... aircraft and a tank targeted infrastructure used for underground activity as well as military posts belonging to the Hamas terror organisation,” Israel’s army said. A security source in Gaza confirmed a number of Israeli strikes on a Hamas base near Beit Lahia in northern Gaza, with no reports of injuries.

SOURCE: AFP



In this photo taken on Friday, prison inmates lie to sleep at the crowded courtyard of the Quezon City jail in Manila. UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet has urged countries to protect people held in overcrowded prisons, saying Covid-19 “risks rampaging through such institutions”.

PHOTO: AFP

Fears of domestic violence grip Europe

AFP, Berlin

With families across Europe confined to their homes to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus, fears are rising of a surge in domestic violence.

From Berlin to Paris, Madrid, Rome and Bratislava, associations that help victims of domestic violence have sounded the alarm after Europe overtook China to become the epicentre of the pandemic.

“For many people, their home is already not a safe place,” says the German federal association of women’s counselling centres and helplines (BFF).

But the stress caused by social isolation is exacerbating tensions and increasing “the risk of domestic and sexual violence against women and children”, the association warns.

And the risks are not limited to homes where violence was already a problem before.

On top of the stress caused by confinement, fears around job security and financial difficulties are also increasing the likelihood of conflicts.

“It’s putting a lot of pressure on households,” says Florence Claudepierre, head of the FCPE parents’ federation in the Upper Rhine, a region hit hard by the pandemic in France.

She said she is hearing stories of “parents who are cracking, who can’t carry on” in families that have not previously had any problems.

In China, which is slowly emerging from several weeks of total lockdown, the women’s rights organisation Weiping has reported a threefold increase in reports of violence against women.

In Spain, which has the second-worst outbreak in Europe after Italy, a 35-year-old mother of two was murdered by her partner last week.

Presence of virus on surfaces may not mean it is infectious

Say scientists, stress the importance of hygiene

THE STRAITS TIMES ONLINE

A virus may be detectable on a surface days after a patient leaves behind traces, but this does not necessarily mean it is still infectious, experts say. This is because most detection methods pick up the presence of the viral genetic material, which may linger for days even after the structure of the virus itself is broken.

An intact structure is needed for a virus to infect a host, such as a human, said Professor Wang Linfa, director of the emerging infectious diseases programme at Duke-NUS Medical School.

“Currently, the only way we can detect (the presence of the virus) is through its nucleic acid material, and this may or may not mean that we still have a live virus,” he told The Straits Times. “This is why hygiene is very important, because disinfectants and soap can get rid of live viruses that are transmissible.”

His points clarify a study by the United States Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which was published earlier this week.

In the study, the CDC said the genetic material of the coronavirus could be detected on surfaces in the cabins of infected passengers on board a cruise ship for up to 17 days after cabins were vacated, but before disinfection procedures had been conducted.

Dr Michael Mina, a physician and assistant professor in immunology and infectious diseases at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, remarked on Twitter that the CDC findings did not show the virus causing Covid-19 could survive for more than 17 days on a surface.

“(It just shows) that the viral RNA is detectable for at least 17 days,” he said. “That’s like saying that detecting DNA on a piece of hair post-mortem means a person is alive.” Under a microscope, a coronavirus like the one causing the Covid-19 disease appears spherical, with a “crown” of spikes on its surface.

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