

Coronavirus: A worrying increase in the number of cases in Algeria

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Could the epidemic escape the control of health authorities in Algeria, where the balance sheet of Covid-19 is inexorably continuing its progression?

Since the beginning of July, the official number of contaminations has been close to 500 cases per day, against 250 at the end of June. An underestimated number, according to doctors who are trying to raise awareness by increasing the number of distress calls on social networks, being alarmed by a catastrophic situation in several hospitals.

The Algerian government, which until now had a reassuring speech, took on Thursday, July 9 in the evening, new measures to stop this outbreak, including traffic bans between the *"Most affected"* 29 wilayas (departments) for a week and a partial lockdown in nearly 25 municipalities in the country.

A total of 19 195 contaminations have been recorded in the country, and 1 011 deaths since the start of the epidemic, according to official numbers. A reduced count since the cases were detected presumably positive by chest X-rays, a long used method for lack of available tests, are no longer taken into account.

Hospitals are saturated, without means, and above all, there are not enough tests, while the Pasteur institute only tests 2,000 people a day.

The reality of the official numbers is regularly undermined by feedback from the field, despite the authorities' desire to centralize the reports at the national level by prohibiting their publication at the local level and by prosecuting whistleblowers in the name of the fight against

the "*Spreading of fake news*". In Biskra (northeast of the Sahara), the sociologist and writer Farès Cherfeddine Choukri, who denounces the situation being "*deplorable*" of patient care in hospitals, was arrested and placed under judicial supervision, and his trial was postponed to July 12.

"They kill people through negligence"

More and more doctors pay a high price for their fight against the disease, they are sounding the alarm: "*The epidemic is on the rise*", "*patients are sleeping on the floor*", "*there is no longer a Covid service, the whole hospital is Covid*" ...

On Sunday July 12, the director of a hospital in Laghouat, 400 kilometers from Algiers, died in intensive care four days after being tested and found positive. On Tuesday, July 7, Anissa Laissaoui, a 25-year old pregnant nurse in a hospital in the prefecture of Bouira (100 km south-east of Algiers), also succumbed after contracting the virus at her workplace, causing the anger of her colleagues, who expressed their fed-up at the entrance to the Sour El-Ghozlane hospital. On May 15, the death of a 25-year-old doctor and the child she had been carrying for eight months had already outraged many Algerians.

"We have nothing, there is not enough oxygen. They don't provide us masks. Breathing devices are connected to patients in turn. They kill people through negligence", said a nurse in the hospital of Biskra, where three doctors succumbed to the disease. Distraught by all the issues, a doctor called the same day his colleagues from "Public" and "Private" hospitals to come to the aid of the "CHU" teams who were completely overwhelmed.

On Wednesday, it was the head of the emergency radiology department of the "CHU" of Sétif who died after being infected with the coronavirus. According to the doctors' unions, they are forty, in total, to have been victims of the pandemic, including four doctors and a nurse, in the space of twenty-four hours, last week.

About 1 700 health workers have been affected by the pandemic, according to Professor Abdelkrim Soukhal, member of the scientific committee, responsible for monitoring the evolution of the epidemic. *"When all the doctors who are at the front will be unable to do their work due to exhaustion, there will be no one left to treat patients"*, warns Doctor Mohamed Yousfi, head of the infectious disease department at Boufarik hospital, near Algiers, in an interview with "Agence France-Presse".

Conspiracy theories

"Many patients do not believe in the reality of the disease, thinking it is just another lie from the government", emphasizes an Algerian doctor. He describes the medical issues hospitals are dealing with , in addition, with the conspiracy theories that thrive on social media, and with what they call unconsciousness, denial and laxity.

Translated by:NesrineTranslate