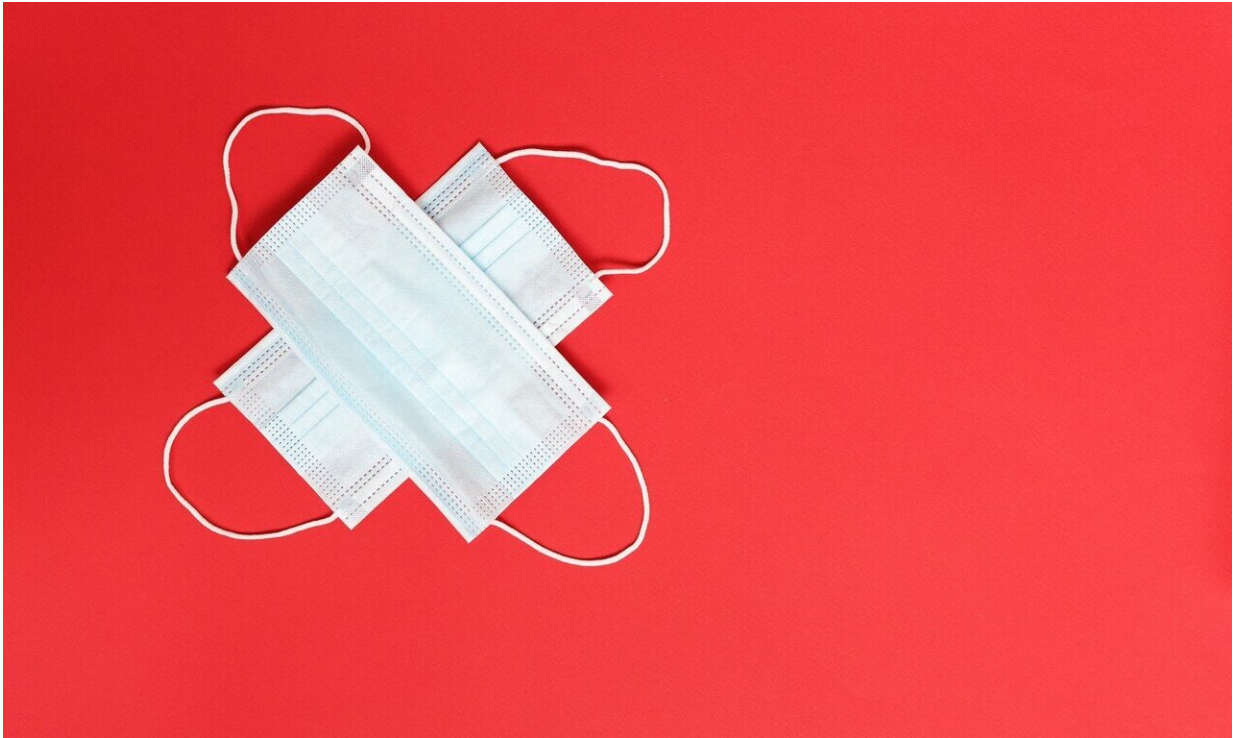


# Brazil virus death toll passes 130,000

September 12 2020

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Brazil's death toll from COVID-19 surpassed 130,000 Friday, amid cautious optimism over signs the virus is finally slowing in the hard-hit South American country.

With the second-highest [death toll](#) in the pandemic after the United States, Brazil has been devastated by the new coronavirus, which has

now claimed 130,396 lives in the country, according to the [health ministry](#).

Brazil, home to 212 million people, has registered nearly 4.3 million infections, behind only the US and India.

After a seemingly endless plateau in which the number of daily deaths was regularly over 1,000 from June to August, Brazil's curve appears to be descending at last.

The average number of deaths per day for the past week was 696.

"The models indicate we are past the peak... and starting a descent, albeit with levels that are still unacceptably high," immunologist Guilherme Werneck told a seminar this week organized by Brazil's leading public health research institute, the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz).

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro faces criticism for his handling of the virus, which he has downplayed as a "little flu."

Now on his third health minister of the crisis—an army general with no prior medical experience—the far-right president regularly attacks the stay-at-home measures recommended by global health authorities, insisting the [economic damage](#) would be worse than the disease.

Instead, he is pushing the anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine as a remedy, despite studies showing it is ineffective against COVID-19.

Meanwhile, the virus has proved devastating for some of Brazil's most [vulnerable groups](#), notably residents of impoverished favelas, or slums, and [indigenous communities](#) in the Amazon rainforest.

The fear now is that as the country emerges from lockdowns—which

only had limited compliance to begin with—the number of infections and deaths will surge again.

"To tell you the truth, the first wave still isn't over in Brazil," the epidemiological modelling specialist Thomas Mellan of Imperial College London told the Fiocruz seminar.

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