
More than ten percent of medics infected with COVID-19 in several countries

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COVID-19 continues to infect thousands of people across the world and healthcare workers are no exception, the World Health Organization chief said, calling the high ratio of medical personnel struck by the disease a source of major unease.

"We are particularly concerned by the large numbers of infections reported among health workers," WHO Director General Tedros Ghebreyesus said during his media briefing on Friday. He noted that the increasing number of medics affected by the pandemic raises the risk for everyone else, since such developments diminish any national health system's ability to combat the virus.

"In some countries there are reports of more than 10 percent of health workers being infected," he said, adding that evidence from China, Italy, Singapore, Spain and the U.S. shows medical personnel are being infected outside of health facilities. "This is an alarming trend."

It's unclear, however, how widespread the problem really is. Media reports from late March suggested that medics amounted for between eight and 14 percent of all confirmed coronavirus cases in countries including Italy and Spain, which saw thousands of their healthcare workers infected. More than 100 doctors had died from Covid-19 in Italy alone by early April. However, it is not clear what percentage of all healthcare workers in these countries has been affected by the disease.

In other European nations, the spread of the virus is showing signs of a slowdown. The numbers have even prompted Norway, Denmark, the Czech Republic and Austria to announce plans to relax strict isolation rules imposed to stem the transmission of COVID-19. Germany is also considering easing some of its lockdown measures. Halfway around the world, similar steps are being taken by Japan and Singapore.

Ghebreyesus warns, however, that a desire to free people – and economies – from the tight grip of the anti-

coronavirus measures might well become these nations' undoing. "WHO wants to see restrictions lifted as much as anyone. At the same time, lifting restrictions too quickly could lead to a deadly resurgence," he said. The UN public health agency's head also said that the pandemic clearly demonstrated deficiencies in each and every national healthcare system around the world -- particularly in developed countries.

No country is immune. No country can claim it has a strong health system. We have to be really honest and assess and address this problem. The deadly coronavirus outbreak was declared a pandemic by the WHO last month after spreading rapidly around the world. To date, more than 1.6 million confirmed cases have been recorded, and the disease has claimed more than 100,000 lives.
