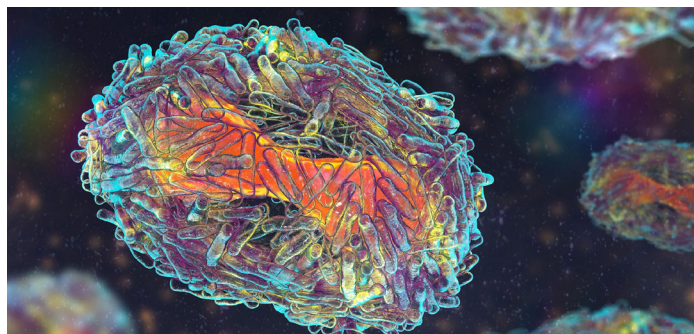


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FEATURED Q&A

Are Covid Lessons Helping the Region Fight Monkeypox?



In Latin America, Brazil and Peru have reported the highest instances of monkeypox, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. // File Photo: Tufts University.

Q More than 1,800 cases of monkeypox have been reported in Latin America and the Caribbean as of Aug. 2, with Brazil and Peru reporting the highest instances of the disease, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The World Health Organization in July declared the spread of the virus a global health emergency. How much have health care systems in Latin America and the Caribbean improved since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, and what lessons has the region learned that can help governments address the spread of monkeypox? What countries are best prepared for another medical emergency? What protections have been developed for vulnerable populations, especially the LGBTQ community, which has been disproportionately affected by the monkeypox spread?

A Luis Benveniste, regional director of human development in Latin America and the Caribbean at the World Bank: "One of the clearest examples of public health system strengthening during the Covid-19 pandemic has been on molecular testing capacity in several Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries, where broad laboratory networks sharing genomic surveillance data have been put in place. However, despite the investments and policy response to the Covid-19 pandemic, underlying weaknesses remain in areas that will be much needed to control monkeypox. For instance, active case finding, contact tracing and isolation was significantly enhanced during the pandemic, but more recently it has been deprioritized in many countries. This is vital for monkeypox response and likely to work well because most

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

U.S. Sees Rise in Weapons Smuggling to Haiti

U.S. authorities said Wednesday that they have seen a rise in the number and caliber of weapons being smuggled to Haiti, which has experienced a surge in gang violence.

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ECONOMIC

Colombian Gov't to Propose More Social Spending

Colombian Finance Minister José Antonio Ocampo said the government will seek higher levels of social spending for programs that new President Gustavo Petro has proposed.

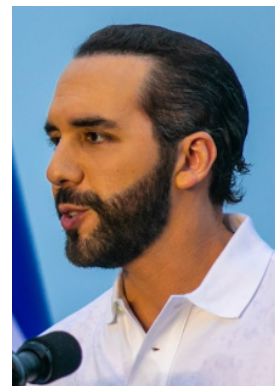
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POLITICAL

El Salvador Extends State of Emergency

Salvadoran lawmakers again extended a state of emergency, which President Nayib Bukele first proposed in March, that gives authorities broader powers to make arrests and detain people suspected of crimes.

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Bukele // File Photo: Salvadoran Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

El Salvador Extends State of Emergency, 50,000 Arrested

El Salvador's Legislative Assembly has again extended the country's state of emergency, first put in place in March to combat gang violence, the Associated Press reported Wednesday. Since the emergency measures first took effect five months ago, authorities have arrested some 50,000 people. Under the state of emergency, authorities have broad latitude in making arrests and holding people suspected of crimes. Suspects' right to be informed of the reason for their arrest, as well as their right to access a lawyer, are suspended, the AP reported. Authorities can also intervene in the mail and calls of anyone they consider as a suspect, and people who are arrested can be held for as long as 15 days without charges, up from the previous three days, the wire service reported. The current state of emergency expires on Saturday, and lawmakers' extension of it will keep it in force for an additional month. President Nayib Bukele first requested the state of emergency in late March after gangs were blamed for the killings of 62 people, and lawmakers have routinely extended it since then. A few dozen protesters gathered outside the Legislative Assembly building late Tuesday as lawmakers prepared to vote on the latest extension, the AP reported. While the emergency measures have drawn criticism as heavy-handed and a violation of human rights, polls have shown them to be widely popular in El Salvador, the AP reported. "Nearly two decades of polling on crime and punitive measures repeatedly show that a majority of Salvadorans support these 'tough on crime' policies," Christine J. Wade, director of the International Studies Program at Washington College in Chestertown, Md., told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published Aug. 1. "In fact, some feel these policies aren't tough enough," Wade added. Human rights groups and relatives of people detained under the measures say arrests have been made without due process

and that suspects who have been arrested are being jailed for months as they await trial, the Associated Press reported.

U.S. Sees Increase in Number of Weapons Smuggled to Haiti

U.S. government authorities announced Wednesday that they have seen an increase in the number and caliber of weapons being smuggled from Florida to Haiti in recent months, the Associated Press reported. The head of the Miami Homeland Security Investigations office, Anthony Salisbury, alongside representatives of the Coast Guard and Customs and Border Protection, said authorities are increasing efforts to halt the flow of weapons to Haiti and the Caribbean more generally, Reuters reported. Since the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021, Haiti has seen an surge in gang violence, especially in the last few weeks, the AP reported. The country has also recently seen a series of scandals related to arms-trafficking. In July, Haiti's customs agency seized several shipping containers labeled church donations that contained illegal weapons and ammunition, according to Reuters. On Wednesday, Haitian police told Reuters that a local priest had been arrested in connection with the incident. In July, the U.N. Security Council unanimously passed a resolution that urged countries to halt the transfer of small arms, light weapons and ammunition to Haiti, the AP reported.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Colombian Gov't to Propose More Social Spending: Ocampo

Colombia's new government is planning to present a proposal to increase the country's 2023 budget to boost social spending, Reuters reported on Wednesday. Finance Minister José

NEWS BRIEFS

Brazilian Police Accuse Bolsonaro of Crimes Over Response to Covid

Brazil's federal police on Wednesday accused President Jair Bolsonaro of committing crimes by discouraging mask use during the Covid-19 pandemic and by falsely linking vaccination against the disease to a risk of contracting AIDS, Reuters reported. The police, in a document sent to Brazil's Supreme Court, asked Justice Alexandre de Moraes to authorize authorities to charge Bolsonaro in connection with the statements. Brazil's solicitor general's office, which typically represents the president in legal matters, did not immediately respond to a request for comment by Reuters.

Suspect Arrested in Ecuador Bombing That Killed Five

Ecuadorian police on Wednesday arrested a suspect believed to be responsible for the Sunday bombing in Guayaquil that killed five people and left another 17 injured, Agence France-Presse reported. Interior Minister Patrio Carrillo said on Twitter that the suspect admitted his involvement in the attack and had a criminal history. In the attack, two people on a motorcycle threw a bag of explosives into a Guayaquil restaurant.

Urrá, Luxpower Announce Start of Colombia Solar Project

Colombia's Urrá Public Services Company and the Luxpower Consortium have announced the start of the Urrá solar park project, which will use Trina Solar's high-power modules and smart trackers, becoming the solar company's first integrated project, PV Magazine reported today. The project, located in the northern Córdoba department, is expected to begin operating in July 2023 and will supply 25 megawatts of energy to the grid.

Antonio Ocampo told the Senate that the budget proposal presented by the previous Duque administration in July did not include sufficient funding. New President Gustavo Petro has proposed initiatives including anti-hunger efforts, free public universities and support for elderly individuals without a pension. Ocampo added that Colombia will undertake public debt swaps with the aim of reducing the cost of financing the country's public debt in the short term. The 2023 budget requires congressional approval and must be passed by Oct. 20, according to Colombian financial newspaper La República.

BUSINESS NEWS

Sagicor Group Acquires Alliance's Dealer Book

Sagicor Group Jamaica announced this week that subsidiary Sagicor Investments Jamaica had completed the acquisition of the securities dealer book of business of Alliance Investment Management Limited (AIML), local newspaper The Gleaner reported on Wednesday. Sagicor, which had announced its intention to move forward with the deal in April, said its completion followed a due diligence process and compliance with regulatory requirements. The base cash purchase price was 2.6 billion Jamaican dollars (\$17.17 million), with the possibility of reaching 3.4 billion Jamaican dollars if certain performance criteria are met, Loop News Jamaica reported, citing a Sagicor financial report. Sagicor Group Jamaica President and CEO Christopher Zacca said the purchase of AIML's client portfolio "expands the business of Sagicor investments, offering an opportunity to serve a wider client base," The Gleaner reported. Previously, in April, Sagicor Group completed the purchase of 100 percent of the shares of Alliance Financial Services (ASFL), another Alliance entity. ASFL was recently enabled on the international MoneyGram platform, and its acquisition allowed Sagicor to expand into new business segments, such as remittances and microfinance.

FEATURED Q&A / Continued from page 1

transmission occurs when patients have symptoms. Second, ring vaccination for primary or secondary contacts of the infected individual is key. Yet, adequate vaccines are not available in most LAC countries, representing a crucial problem that persists in the region and globally. And third, adequate risk communication is a critical but underappreciated aspect of the monkeypox outbreak response. The focus of communication should be behaviors—not people—that may be fueling the outbreak, which is directly linked to preventing stigma on the LGBTQ community. Science must be the centerpiece of communication to confront misinformation by verifying facts and rumors as well to advocate and train health reporters and the media. Health system resilience in LAC was indeed strengthened in many areas due to Covid-19, but continuity and sustainability of such progress are a central challenge and will be essential to adequately tackle monkeypox in the region."

A Sarah Aiosa, president for Latin America at MSD, known as Merck & Co. Inc. in the United States and Canada:

"Among the many lessons learned from the pandemic, perhaps the most important one is the realization that effective and efficient health systems are not only critical for responding to emerging health threats, but also are indispensable for economic growth and social development. Thankfully, in the wake of Covid-19, many governments across the region identified the need to address key health care system gaps, including improvements to infrastructure, education, governance, intersectoral coordination and investment. Despite advancements, Latin America's public expenditure on health (3.7 percent of GDP) remains far below the 6 percent of GDP target recommended by the Pan-American Health Organization. This chronic underfinancing of health care systems means countries in our region will need to step up their investment in health

care in a sustainable way to be prepared for monkeypox or any future health emergencies. Another important lesson from Covid-19 is that governments need to work with the private sector to provide broad and innovative ways to respond to health emergencies and continue to develop resilient, inclusive, sustainable and equitable health ecosystems. Unfortunately, in our region, vulnerable populations continue to struggle to access appropriate, accurate and timely information and care. As members of an inclusive society, we must remain vigilant that monkeypox does not amplify existing inequities further, or inappropriately stigmatize the LGBTQ+ community or any other groups. Public and private sectors, along with civil society, must work together to create inclusive health models and accessible care practices to reach all people across Latin America, regardless of who they are or where they live."

A Antonio Vergara, president and head of Roche Diagnostics in Latin America: "The Covid-19 pandemic put health care at the center of discussions regarding its role in the protection of people and economic development. While health ecosystems in Latin America have made significant progress since then, we still have an opportunity to distill lessons learned from this experience. It is necessary for the private and public sectors to put together their talent, experience and resources to take advantage of innovative diagnostic and care solutions, implement dynamic regulatory frameworks for their adoption and promote interconnected information systems across the region. This will enable the collection and analysis of data to better understand public health emergencies and make timely decisions on the actions required to face them. In this sense, the countries best prepared for a new public health emergency are those that have understood the value of collaborative work to transform their health ecosystems, start-

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ing by setting or strengthening permanent prevention and diagnosis programs that contribute to a more efficient decision-making process. Tests for monkeypox are already available, but realities across countries change; therefore, collaboration is what can make diagnostic tests the most effective tool to protect our people, especially those who are more vulnerable. At Roche, we will continue exploring opportunities to foster meaningful partnerships that allow innovation to positively affect people and play a role in preventing a new crisis.”

A Mariana Rico, regional medical director at the Americas Health Foundation: “The Covid-19 pandemic, now more than two years old, has deeply affected Latin American countries with millions of cases and deaths. So, the question remains: is the region prepared for another infectious disease outbreak? The answer to this question varies from country to country, but undoubtedly, as a region, we are in a better position today to address the monkeypox emergency than we were for the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. Monkeypox is different than Covid-19 in terms of resource requirements because it is currently considered a self-limited condition in most cases. Many of the

region’s ministries of health have recognized the window of opportunity to contain the outbreaks and have emitted guidelines and information to the general public on how to avoid the spread of monkeypox and what to do if infection is suspected. In Latin America, it is important to keep in mind that accurate differential diagnoses are made with other conditions of regional importance such as varicella, measles and syphilis. In terms of laboratory capacity, Latin American countries have strengthened molecular laboratory infrastructure as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, which could be useful to diagnose monkeypox once the primers and protocols are standardized in the reference sites. As vaccines and treatments become available, countries will need to expedite regulatory processes to approve their use and prioritize access, especially for vulnerable populations and complicated cases. A key lesson learned from the Covid-19 pandemic is the importance of using evidence-based treatments and interventions. Guidance from infectious disease societies and ministries of health will be crucial.”

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at ekuleta@thedialogue.org.

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