



Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The COVID-19 resource centre is hosted on Elsevier Connect, the company's public news and information website.

Elsevier hereby grants permission to make all its COVID-19-related research that is available on the COVID-19 resource centre - including this research content - immediately available in PubMed Central and other publicly funded repositories, such as the WHO COVID database with rights for unrestricted research re-use and analyses in any form or by any means with acknowledgement of the original source. These permissions are granted for free by Elsevier for as long as the COVID-19 resource centre remains active.



## Should the Holy Week 2020 be cancelled in Latin America due to the COVID-19 pandemic?



Dear Editor

After the spreading of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Asia, Europe, Oceania, Africa, and North America, this emerging disease arrived in Latin America [1]. Up to March 21, 2020, more than 1,900 COVID-19 confirmed cases had been reported in Brazil, the first case of Latin America and the Caribbean diagnosed there, Mexico, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Honduras, Costa Rica, Colombia, among others. As has been occurred in other areas, especially in Asia, at least for the following weeks and months, we will see a significant number of cases in those and newly affected countries in this region, with multiple implications [1].

On April 5, 2020, it will begin the Holy Week. This period, according to religious beliefs, is an annual commemoration of the Passion of Christ, which includes the entrance to Jerusalem, the last dinner, the *viacrucis*, the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The liturgies and activities related attract the biggest crowds of the year in Catholic countries, as is the case of most in Latin America and the Caribbean, but also in Italy, Spain, and the Philippines, among others. Then, this should draw attention to the potential superspreader events, as has also been referred for the Umrah pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia concerning the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak [2]. In Latin America, there are multiple cities famous for their Holy Week processions including Mexico, with thousands of people attending religious gatherings in Iztapalapa, Mexico City, Taxco, San Miguel de Allende, and San Luis Potosí; Brazil with the celebrations in Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Campanha; among many others. The impact of COVID-19 in Asia and Europe, including restrictions or cancellations of activities, is already seen [3]. Particularly in Italy, a catholic country, masses in the northern region were canceled, and now this trending in many cities in Latin America.

Cases of COVID-19 may be seeded in and transmitted out of different cities in Latin America by Catholic pilgrims and holy week-travellers. In addition to that, seasonality poses an additional challenge in Latin America, as in temperate climates seasonal viral respiratory infections activity, such as influenza [4], peaks during the winter months, November–February in the northern hemisphere, but May–October in southern hemisphere including most of South America, while in the tropics and subtropical regions, including Central America, the Caribbean, and Mexico, it usually occurs throughout the year, but espe-

cially during the rainy season which is also beginning now.

The scenario is even more complicated, as in Latin America, already other epidemic infectious diseases, causing fever, are struggling with compromised healthcare systems, as is the case of dengue and measles [1]. Then, structured health protection messages not only from health authorities but from their religious authorities in the region would be deserved. Handwashing and respiratory hygiene should be part of the rituals and mandatory often, yet the overcrowding and other risk factors may outweigh the benefits. Restrictions on performing Holy Weeks face to face activities, instead of virtual via web or television, is a highly sensitive proposition that requires further vetting, especially when multiple countries would be affected, in order to avoid religious-activities related COVID-19 cases in this period. Voluntary cancellations of travels and activities during Holy Week might be proposed, especially for elderly individuals with chronic and underlying conditions until the COVID-19 epidemic is under control. For health authorities, as usually is in certain countries, the Holy Week should be a period for additional enhancements of surveillance of infectious diseases, including COVID-19 in order to prevent more additional cases.

### Credit

AJRM, Conceptualization; Writing - original draft; Writing - review & editing. RS, Writing - review & editing. APM, Writing - review & editing.

### Funding source

None.

### Declaration of competing interest

Nothing to declare.

### References

- [1] Rodriguez-Morales AJ, Gallego V, Escalera-Antezana JP, Mendez CA, Zambrano LI, Franco-Paredes C, et al. COVID-19 in Latin America: the implications of the first confirmed case in Brazil. *Trav Med Infect Dis* 2020:101613.

- [2] Ebrahim SH, Memish ZA. COVID-19: preparing for superspreader potential among Umrah pilgrims to Saudi Arabia. *Lancet* 2020;395(10227):e48. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30466-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30466-9).
- [3] Gallego V, Nishiura H, Sah R, Rodríguez-Morales AJ. The COVID-19 outbreak and implications for the Tokyo 2020 Summer olympic games. *Trav Med Infect Dis* 2020:101604.
- [4] Gentile A, Paget J, Bellei N, Torres JP, Vazquez C, Laguna-Torres VA, et al. Influenza in Latin America: a report from the global influenza initiative (GII). *Vaccine* 2019;37:2670–8.

Alfonso J. Rodríguez-Morales\*  
Public Health and Infection Research Group, Faculty of Health Sciences,  
Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira, Pereira, Risaralda, Colombia  
Grupo de Investigación Biomedicina, Faculty of Medicine, Fundación  
Universitaria Autónoma de las Américas, Pereira, Risaralda, Colombia  
Latin American Network of Coronavirus Disease 2019-COVID-19 Research  
(LANCOVID-19), Pereira, Risaralda, Colombia  
E-mail address: [arodriguezm@utp.edu.co](mailto:arodriguezm@utp.edu.co).

Ranjit Sah  
Department of Microbiology, Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital,  
Institute of Medicine, Kathmandu, Nepal  
Latin American Network of Coronavirus Disease 2019-COVID-19 Research  
(LANCOVID-19), Pereira, Risaralda, Colombia

Alberto Paniz-Mondolfi  
Laboratory of Medical Microbiology, Department of Pathology, Molecular  
and Cell-based Medicine, The Mount Sinai Hospital-Icahn School of  
Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, USA  
Laboratorio de Señalización Celular y Bioquímica de Parásitos, Instituto de  
Estudios Avanzados (IDEA), Caracas, Caracas, Venezuela  
Academia Nacional de Medicina, Caracas, Venezuela  
Instituto de Investigaciones Biomedicas IDB, Incubadora Venezolana de la  
Ciencia, Cabudare, Edo. Lara, Venezuela  
Latin American Network of Coronavirus Disease 2019-COVID-19 Research  
(LANCOVID-19), Pereira, Risaralda, Colombia

\* Corresponding author. Public Health and Infection Research Group, Faculty of Health Sciences, Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira, Pereira, Risaralda, Colombia.