

# COVID-19 CASES ON THE RISE IN COAL MINES

## NEW OUTBREAKS EXPOSE HEALTH RISKS OF UNDERGROUND COAL MINING, LACK OF TRANSPARENCY IN PUBLIC DATA

### SUMMARY

Reported cases of novel coronavirus are on the rise in the world's coal mines during the second quarter of 2020. While data on coal mine outbreaks has not been made publicly or systematically available, Global Energy Monitor has documented more than a [dozen mines](#) with confirmed cases since the end of March 2020. Poland and Czech Republic have reported the largest outbreaks, with nearly 4,000 confirmed cases and hundreds of additional workers in quarantine. In Poland, coal miners and their families [comprise](#) approximately 16% of the nation's total cases of COVID-19. However, it should be noted that the countries with the largest number of underground miners (China, India, and the United States) have provided very little information about the prevalence of COVID-19 cases in coal mines.

The cramped workplace conditions of underground mines have contributed to the [increased risk](#) for miners to contract the virus. In multiple countries, coal miners and trade unions have publicly [protested](#) the risk of exposure and health-and-safety [protocols](#) in operational mines. Compared to the general population, these workers have [higher incidences](#) of respiratory illness. Yet the number of COVID-19 cases, or extent of testing, has not been [publicly disclosed](#) by industry or regulatory agencies, making it difficult to model rates of transmission.

### BACKGROUND

As the COVID-19 pandemic induces a global economic recession, coal operators have [continued](#) to operate as essential businesses in many parts of the world, and even [resisted](#) nationwide lockdowns. While weakened demand for steel and energy have encouraged some operators to [lay off workers](#) and [reduce capacity](#) given delays or potential delays in the supply chain, other operators have maintained operational capacities or even [sped up](#) production schedules.

The earliest reports of COVID-19 in coal mines appeared on March 30 after two miners at Consol Energy Inc.'s [Bailey Mine](#) in Pennsylvania, USA tested positive. The rates have increased in mines in several OECD countries ever since, infecting thousands of workers and their families. The highest number of cases have been reported in Poland and Czech Republic, with operators in India and the United States, among others, implementing quarantines and lockdowns to minimize exposure, and Turkey's government instituting a travel ban to the Zonguldak mine province because of its high number of cases.

### OUTBREAKS IN COAL MINES

#### #1 POLAND

In late April, Poland's largest state-run coal mining company, Polska Grupa Górnicza (PGG), suspended operations at three coal mines due to the spread of COVID-19 among its workers: at the Jankowice mine,

204 miners [tested positive](#); at the Sońnica mine, 53 [tested positive](#); and at the Murcki-Staszic mine, 38 [tested positive](#). JSW SA, a state run coal firm, has [reported](#) 1,648 confirmed cases among miners at its Pniówek, Jastrzębie-Bzie, Budryk, and Borynia-Zofiówka mines.

To date, the Silesia coal mining region has recorded the highest number of infections in Poland. Due to the rapid spread of cases in Silesia, the government announced on May 7, that it would [begin to test](#) 1,000 miners a day in drive-through sites. As of May 26, about 3,640 coal miners and members of their families have [contracted](#) the virus, comprising approximately 16 percent of all reported cases in the country.

## #2 CZECH REPUBLIC

On May 19, an outbreak of cases at the [Darkov coal mine](#), operated by OKD near the town of Karvina, Czech Republic was responsible for the country's largest daily rise in COVID-19 cases in four weeks. After 139 coal miners [tested positive](#), the number rose to more than 212 after systematic testing of miners and their families. OKD has [shut down](#) operations and called for assistance from Czech Army medics.

## #3 UNITED STATES

On March 30, Consol Energy Inc.'s Bailey Mine in Pennsylvania [shut down](#) after two workers tested positive for Covid-19. The same day, five Virginia coal mines [halted](#) operations to stop the spread of coronavirus ([Buchanan Mine No.1](#), [Osaka](#), Pigeon Creek, North Fork and D-31). On April 21, Arch Coal Inc.'s [West Elk](#) mine in Colorado [reported](#) 4 employees tested positive for COVID 19. In Alabama, two coal mines reported [cases](#) in April (Peabody Energy's [Shoal Creek](#) and Warrior Met Coal's [No. 7 mine](#)).

In May, it was reported that the Mine Safety and Health Administration in the U.S. [was not](#) collecting data on rates of COVID-19 infections in coal mines, but earlier in April officials told reporters they were "[keeping a spreadsheet](#)" of COVID-related closures. So far, no figures have been publicly released.

## #4 INDIA

On April 2, Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) [laid off](#) its underground miners in the state of Telangana, India, to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Global Energy Monitor data indicates that the company operates two dozen underground mines in the state, producing 27 million tonnes of coal per year. According to Miriyala Raji Reddy, a union leader, about 2,000 miners were engaged in underground operations at the time of the layoffs. On April 3, South Eastern Coalfields Limited, Coal India's largest producing subsidiary, [ordered](#) 83 employees into quarantine after they attended a religious gathering where they were exposed to a carrier of the virus.

## #5 TURKEY

In April, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan included the mine region of Zonguldak in an intercity travel ban and imposed a weekend curfew due to the "prevalence of lung diseases." Zonguldak, the largest producer of hard coal in Turkey, was the only small province on the travel ban list, but [reported](#) 463 COVID-19 cases despite its small population.

## UNDERGROUND MINERS AT RISK

Incidences of COVID-19 are especially acute in underground mines. As [reported](#), the labor process in underground coal mines precludes social distancing. Miners often work in cramped conditions, for long durations, and share tools and workspaces. As researchers at the Center for Disease Control have [studied](#), these circumstances increase the risk of transmitting the virus and raise concerns about [outbreaks](#) in industrial facilities, as witnessed in meatpacking plants. [According](#) to the United Mine Workers of America, these circumstances "greatly exacerbate the severity of the symptoms related to COVID-19." Underground miners in other resource industries face similar circumstances: 900 workers at the Olimpiada gold mine in Russia [tested positive](#) for COVID-19 on May 20. The problem is likely worsened in mines that lack strict safety standards and ventilation, including the small, unregulated operations that still persist in many countries.

Coal miners in underground operations have statistically [higher incidences](#) of respiratory illness, such as pneumoconiosis (“black lung disease”), and in the [United States](#) and [Europe](#) are older on average (49-50 years), which places them immunologically at elevated risk. Of the approximately [7 million](#) coal miners worldwide, most work underground. This is especially true in China, the largest producer, where 85.6 percent of the mine workforce is employed or contracted in underground operations. Other countries with large underground operations [include](#) the United States, Australia, and India.

## **BACKGROUND ON GLOBAL ENERGY MONITOR**

Global Energy Monitor is a nonprofit research organization developing information on fossil fuel projects worldwide. Through its Global Coal Plant Tracker (GCPT) project, Global Energy Monitor has provided biannual updates on coal-fired generating capacity since 2015. GCPT data is used by the International Energy Agency (IEA), the OECD Environment Directorate, UN Environment Programme, U.S. Treasury Department, and World Bank. GCPT data is licensed by Bloomberg LP and UBS Evidence Lab, and is used by the Economist Intelligence Unit and Bloomberg New Energy Finance.

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