The BMJ

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2020;370:m2615<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m2615>

Published: 01 July 2020

THE BIG PICTURE

Covid care creates oxygen drought

The long tail of damage left behind by the covid-19 pandemic continues to grow, with a worldwide shortage of oxygen.

Massive amounts of the pure gas are used to treat hypoxia in patients with severe covid-19. But millions of people with other medical conditions also rely on oxygen, and their lives are at risk as supplies run out and what is available has soared in price.

Peru has been particularly badly hit, and long queues have formed around oxygen plants in Lima (pictured). The situation has become so extreme that authorities are arresting anyone who tries to jump the queue or to pay someone to keep their place.

In response to this new emergency, the World Health Organization has said it is working with partners to increase access to medical oxygen in developing countries. Its director general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said that at the current incidence of about a million new covid-19 cases a week, the world would need about 88 000 large cylinders of oxygen every day.