

'Wave of silence' spread around world during coronavirus pandemic

Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

1 Warmer

Close your eyes for 30 seconds and listen to all the sounds around you. Then answer these questions:

- What did you hear?
- Which noise was the loudest?

2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then find them in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers will help you.

seismic

spread

remote

reduce

sensor

1. gradually affect a larger area _____ (para 1)
2. relating to earthquakes _____ (para 2)
3. a piece of equipment that shows changes _____ (para 4)
4. far away from other places _____ (para 4)
5. become less in amount or size _____ (para 4)

landslide

signal

lockdown

faultline

at risk

6. a time when people must stay at home either most or all of the time _____ (para 5)
7. be in a dangerous situation _____ (para 8)
8. when heavy rocks and earth fall down a hill or mountain _____ (para 8)
9. a crack in the Earth's surface where earthquakes sometimes happen _____ (para 8)
10. information sent from one thing or person to another using a piece of equipment _____ (para 8)

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Ian Sample

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- 1 A wave of silence spread around the world during the coronavirus pandemic, say researchers.
- 2 Records from seismic stations all over the world show that high-frequency noise from factories, traffic and other human activities fell up to 50% as planes stayed on the ground, roads were empty, and shops and businesses were closed.
- 3 "You can see a wave," said Stephen Hicks, a seismologist from Imperial College London. "It started in China in late January and then moving on to Italy and other countries in March and April."
- 4 The scientists studied data from 268 seismic sensors in 117 countries and found large falls in noise made by people in 185 of the sensors. The largest falls were in busy cities such as New York and Singapore, but remote stations in Germany's Black Forest and in Rundu, Namibia, also became quieter as human activity reduced.
- 5 Around universities and schools in the UK and US, noise levels fell 20% more than in school holidays. In Barbados, high-frequency noise fell by 50% in the weeks before lockdown, as flights stopped and tourists on the island took the last flights home.
- 6 "We have never seen things become this quiet before in our seismic data," said Thomas Lecocq, from the Royal Observatory in Belgium. Digital records of seismic activity started in the 1970s, but paper records go back before that.
- 7 The research shows that noise from human activity spread further than scientists thought. "We normally try to put seismometers in quiet places, but this shows that it's hard to escape the noise," said Hicks.
- 8 As the world population increases and cities grow, more people are at risk from earthquakes, volcanoes and landslides. Human activity hides the small seismic waves that show there is movement on faultlines or the early sounds in a volcano. "It's important to hear those small signals," said Hicks.
- 9 Without the human noise, seismologists can more easily find micro-earthquakes. "In cities with earthquakes, volcanoes and landslides, we want to get an early warning of what's happening. But human noise is increasing all the time, so it has become very difficult to hear those small signals," Hicks said.

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3 Comprehension check

Choose the correct answers for each sentence.

1. The wave of silence started in *Italy / China* and spread to *Italy / China*.
2. Scientists studied data from *seismologists / seismic sensors* in *117 / 268* countries.
3. During lockdown, noise from human activity *reduced / increased* by *20 / 50* %.
4. This is the *first / second* time that scientists have seen a fall in noise this *large / small*.
5. When people are *quiet / loud*, scientists can more easily hear changes made when the Earth *moves / falls*.
6. These *small / loud* changes can give *early / late* warnings that there might be an earthquake.

4 Using the key words

Use some of the key words from task 2 to complete these sentences.

1. My grandparents lived in a _____ village in the mountains.
2. The sinking ship sent out an emergency _____.
3. The forest fire _____ quickly.
4. I started to grow vegetables during _____.
5. Everybody is _____ from coronavirus.
6. I have _____ the amount of meat in my diet.

5 Discussion

- **Before the pandemic, what noises did you hear from your window, balcony or garden at the following times?**
 - o rush hour, e.g. 5 pm on a Monday
 - o 6 am on a weekend day, e.g. Sunday
- **How did the noises at these times change during lockdown? Use some of these words in your answers:**
 - o fell, reduced, increased, quieter, louder, more, less

6 A silent video

Watch the video graphic here. Can you see the wave of silence?

www.theguardian.com/science/2020/jul/23/wave-of-silence-spread-around-world-during-coronavirus-pandemic