

# Anti-virus measures take drastic turns in Saudi, Iran, Italy

March 4 2020, by Matt Sedensky and Lori Hinnant

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Army soldiers wearing protective suits spray disinfectant as a precaution against the new coronavirus at a shopping street in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. The coronavirus epidemic shifted increasingly westward toward the Middle East, Europe and the United States on Tuesday, with governments taking emergency steps to ease shortages of masks and other supplies for front-line doctors and nurses. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)

Saudi Arabia banned citizens from performing this year's Muslim pilgrimage in Mecca, Italy weighed closing schools nationwide and Iran cancelled Friday prayers for a second week as nations scrambled Wednesday to control the coronavirus outbreak.

With deaths spiking in Iran and Italy and infections spreading quickly through Europe, the Mideast and the Americas, countries were considering new drastic measures to curb the new [coronavirus](#) that first emerged in China. In the United States, frustration mounted over officials' delays and missteps in testing people for the virus.

South Korea, Italy and Iran now account for 80% of the new virus cases outside China, according to the World Health Organization.

"People are afraid and uncertain. Fear is a natural human response to any threat," said WHO's leader, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. "But as we get more data, we are understanding this virus and the disease it causes more and more."

WHO said about 3.4% of people infected with the COVID-19 virus globally have died, making it more fatal than the common flu. The figure was a bit of a surprise, since a study published last week in the *New England Journal of Medicine* assessing data from more than 30 Chinese provinces estimated the death rate was 1.4%.

Death rates in outbreaks are likely to skew higher early on as health officials focus on finding severe and fatal cases, missing most milder cases. WHO says the majority of people with the new coronavirus experience only mild symptoms and do not require any treatment.



A traveler has his temperature checked upon arrival from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, at Husein Sastranegara Airport in Bandung, Indonesia, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. Indonesia confirmed its first cases of the coronavirus this week in two people who contracted the illness from a foreign traveler. (AP Photo/Kusumadireza)

In Daegu, the South Korean city at the center of that country's outbreak, a shortage of hospital space meant about 2,300 patients were being cared for in other facilities while they awaited a hospital bed. Attending a meeting on quarantine strategies in Daegu, Prime Minister Chung Se-Kyun sought to assure his country, saying "We can absolutely overcome this situation. ... We will win the war against COVID-19."

South Korea reported 435 new infections Wednesday, far smaller than its high of 851 a day earlier. A total of 5,621 people in South Korea have contracted the virus and 32 have died.

Iran reported 92 deaths among its 2,922 confirmed cases, the most of any country outside of China. Among the ill are members of the government, and the country cancelled Friday prayers for the second week in a row.



Health officials check a baby's temperature in hopes of preventing the spread of the Covid-19 virus at the Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok, Thailand, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)

The deaths in Italy rose to 79. The outbreak in Italy has been concentrated in the northern region of Lombardy, but fears over how the virus is spreading inside and outside the country has prompted the government to consider whether to close all schools nationwide for two weeks, rather than just ones in the cluster regions. Education Minister Lucia Azzolina told reporters that a final decision hadn't been made yet.

The U.N. health chief has warned sharply against hoarding medical supplies, saying they are needed to protect health care workers on the front line. The Czech Republic, Russia and Germany announced bans Wednesday covering various protective gear like masks, following a similar move by France.

In the U.S., more than 120 cases have been reported. Nine people have died, all in and around Seattle, Washington. On Capitol Hill, lawmakers were expected to finalize an agreement Wednesday on a \$7.5 billion emergency bill to fund work on a virus vaccine and other measures.



Tourists wearing protective gear against the Covid-19 virus arrive at the Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok, Thailand, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)

India, meantime, tightened the export of 26 key drug ingredients used in pharmaceutical manufacturing, a potentially disruptive move taken as its caseload rose to 28 Wednesday from an earlier tally of just 5.

China reported 119 new cases Wednesday, all but five in the outbreak's epicenter of Wuhan. In a sign of the shifting threat, Beijing's health commissioner said two new cases in the Chinese capital were apparently infected abroad, in Iran and Italy.

The state-run Xinhua News Agency said Hubei province, where Wuhan is located, was expected to gradually shut down its hastily built temporary hospitals, where thousands of beds were empty.

"We believe this decline is real," WHO outbreak expert Maria Van Kerkhove said of China. The country has reported 80,270 infections and 2,981 fatalities. It has about 85% of the world's cases and 95% of deaths from the COVID-19 illness.



A cashier counts money behind bottles of hand sanitizers at a medical supply shop in Jakarta, Indonesia, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. Indonesia confirmed its first cases of the coronavirus Monday in two people who contracted the illness from a foreign traveler. (AP Photo/Dita Alangkara)

Doctors working in Wuhan told reporters by video conference Wednesday that hospitals there have an increasing number of empty beds but cautioned there is always the possibility of a new spike of infections.

"The war is not over," said Dr. Cao Bin, who specializes in respiratory research. "The disease is not only a Wuhan disease, and not only a China disease, but also a global disease."

The outbreak was blamed for market instability around the globe. Asian stock markets were mixed Wednesday after Wall Street continued to zigzag, despite an interest rate cut by the Federal Reserve. Businesses of all types were experiencing pain as travel and tourism were spurned and worried consumers changed their habits.

"People are afraid to touch anything or take anything from us," said Maedeh Jahangiri, a perfume seller at an upscale mall in the Iranian capital of Tehran. "Everyone is at a loss."





A Metropolitan Transportation Authority worker sanitizes surfaces at the Coney Island Yard, Tuesday, March 3, 2020, in the Brooklyn borough of New York. The MTA is stepping up efforts to sanitize cars and stations as fears mount over the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Kevin Hagen)



Medical staff wearing protective suits check documents as they wait for people with suspected symptoms of the new coronavirus, at a testing facility in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. The coronavirus epidemic shifted increasingly westward toward the Middle East, Europe and the United States on Tuesday, with governments taking emergency steps to ease shortages of masks and other supplies for front-line doctors and nurses. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)



Workers wearing protective gears spray disinfectant inside an airplane for New York as a precaution against the new coronavirus at Incheon International Airport in Incheon, South Korea, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. The coronavirus epidemic shifted increasingly westward toward the Middle East, Europe and the United States on Tuesday, with governments taking emergency steps to ease shortages of masks and other supplies for front-line doctors and nurses. (Suh Myoung-geon/Yonhap via AP)



A relatively few number of Muslims pray at the Grand Mosque, in the Muslim holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. On Wednesday, Saudi Arabia's Deputy Health Minister Abdel-Fattah Mashat was quoted on the state-linked news site Al-Yaum saying that groups of visitors to Mecca from inside the country would now also be barred from performing the pilgrimage, known as the umrah. (AP Photo/Amr Nabil)



South Korean army trucks spray disinfectant as a precaution against the new coronavirus on a road in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. The coronavirus epidemic shifted increasingly westward toward the Middle East, Europe and the United States on Tuesday, with governments taking emergency steps to ease shortages of masks and other supplies for front-line doctors and nurses. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)



South Korean army soldiers wearing protective gears gather to spray disinfectant as a precaution against the new coronavirus at a shopping street in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. The coronavirus epidemic shifted increasingly westward toward the Middle East, Europe and the United States on Tuesday, with governments taking emergency steps to ease shortages of masks and other supplies for front-line doctors and nurses. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)



A worker wearing a face mask sprays disinfectant as a precaution against the new coronavirus at a subway station in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man)



South Korean army soldiers wearing protective gears spray disinfectant as a precaution against the new coronavirus at a shopping street in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. The coronavirus epidemic shifted increasingly westward toward the Middle East, Europe and the United States on Tuesday, with governments taking emergency steps to ease shortages of masks and other supplies for front-line doctors and nurses. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)





Workers wearing face masks disinfect as a precaution against the new coronavirus at a subway station in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. The letters read "Corona 19, Disinfection." (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man)



A stairwell and hallway are empty at the European Parliament in Brussels, Wednesday, March 4, 2020, as the European Parliament is limiting access to its premises to limit the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The legislative body of the EU institutions said on Tuesday that all its core functions are maintained but that other activities including cultural events, hearings, seminars or informal meetings of political groups and lawmakers are suspended for three weeks. (AP Photo/Olivier Matthys)



A worker wearing a face mask sprays disinfectant as a precaution against the new coronavirus at a subway station in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man)

Saudi Arabia imposed the ban on residents making the Mecca pilgrimage a week after it closed the holiest sites in Islam to foreigners because of the coronavirus.

Japan's prime minister, who ordered schools closed nationwide last week, was pressing for legal backing to declare a state of emergency if needed.

In Spain, dozens of health workers were quarantined or being monitored after at least five were infected with the new virus. In France, the Louvre

finally opened Wednesday after days of meetings to reassure workers worried about catching the virus from visitors.

In the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Boris Johnson warned that virus cases could spread quickly. His government unveiled a 25-page plan for a worst-case scenario in which retired doctors and nurses would be called back to work and police would stop investigating minor crimes to help deal with an outbreak.

"We're committed to doing everything possible ... to prepare for all eventualities," Johnson said.

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