

Over 1.5 billion globally asked to stay home to escape virus

March 23 2020, by Lori Hinnant and Foster Klug



Biologist doctor Caroline Gutschmuth gives a phone call in medical biology laboratory who opened a coronavirus drive-thru testing site, in Neuilly-sur-Seine, near Paris, Monday, March 23, 2020. French President Emmanuel Macron urged employees to keep working in supermarkets, production sites and other businesses that need to keep running amid stringent restrictions of movement due to the rapid spreading of the new coronavirus in the country. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness, especially in older adults and people with

existing health problems. (AP Photo/Christophe Ena)

With masks, ventilators and political goodwill in desperately short supply, more than one-fifth of the world's population was ordered or urged to stay in their homes Monday at the start of what could be a pivotal week in the battle to contain the coronavirus in the U.S. and Europe.

Partisan divisions stalled efforts to pass a colossal aid package in Congress, and stocks fell again on Wall Street even after the Federal Reserve said it will lend to small and large businesses and local governments to help them through the crisis. The Dow Jones Industrial Average lost over 580 points, or 3 percent.

Warning that the outbreak continues to accelerate, the head of the World Health Organization called on countries to take strong, coordinated action.

"We are not helpless bystanders," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said, noting that it took 67 days to reach 100,000 cases worldwide but just four days to go from 200,000 to 300,000. "We can change the trajectory of this pandemic."

The scramble to marshal public health and political resources intensified in New York, where a statewide lockdown took effect amid worries the city of 8.4 million is becoming one of the world's biggest hotspots. More than 12,000 people have tested positive in the city, and almost 100 have died.

The governor announced plans to convert a mammoth New York City convention center into a hospital with 1,000 beds. Meanwhile, the mayor

warned that the city's hospitals are just 10 days away from shortages in basic supplies needed to protect health care workers and patients alike.



Commuters pass through Grand Central Terminal during the morning rush hour, Monday, March 23, 2020, in New York. Gov. Andrew Cuomo has ordered most New Yorkers to stay home from work to slow the coronavirus pandemic. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)

"This is going to get much worse before it gets better. We are still in the relative calm before the storm," Gov. Andrew Cuomo said at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center.

In Italy, the hardest-hit country of all, declines in both new cases and

deaths for a second consecutive day provided a faint glimmer of hope, though it is too soon to say whether the crisis is leveling off.

Italian officials said Monday that the virus had claimed just over 600 more lives, down from 793 two days earlier. All told, the outbreak has killed more than 6,000 Italians, the highest death toll of any country, and pushed the health system to the breaking point there and in Spain.

The risk to doctors, nurses and others on the front lines has become plain: Italy has seen at least 18 doctors with coronavirus die. Spain reported that more than 3,900 health care workers have become infected, accounting for roughly 12% of the country's total cases.



A man walks across a nearly empty Adams Street near The Art Institute of Chicago, Monday, March 23, 2020, in Chicago, on the first work day since

Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker gave a shelter in place order last week. (AP Photo/Charles Rex Arbogast)

British health workers pleaded for more gear, saying they felt like "cannon fodder." In France, doctors scrounged masks from construction workers, factory floors, an architect.

"There's a wild race to get surgical masks," François Blanchecott, a biologist on the front lines of testing, told France Inter radio. "We're asking mayors' offices, industries, any enterprises that might have a store of masks."

The way U.S. officials respond to the severe pressure on hospitals—and people's willingness to keep their distance from others—will prove critical in coming days, public health experts said.

"Actions taken right now will have a huge impact on the course of this epidemic in the U.S.," said Josh Michaud, associate director of global health policy with the Kaiser Family Foundation in Washington. "It's an important moment."



Coffins are lined up on the floor in the Crematorium Temple of Piacenza, Northern Italy, saturated with corpses awaiting cremation due to the coronavirus emergency Monday, March 23, 2020. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness, especially in older adults and people with existing health problems. (Claudio Furlan/LaPresse via AP)

The crisis continued to ease in China. The city of Wuhan, where the outbreak first emerged late last year, said it is allowing residents limited movement as its lockdown is gradually relaxed. China is now sending planeloads of protective gear and doctors to Europe.

"The U.S. is completely wasting the precious time that China has won for the world," said Geng Shuang, the Chinese Foreign Ministry

spokesman.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the U.S. government's top infectious-disease expert, promised that medical supplies are about to start pouring in and will be "clearly directed to those hot spots that need it most."

Meanwhile, on Capitol Hill, the Senate voted against advancing the nearly \$2 trillion plan that would prop up businesses and send checks to American households. Democrats argued it was tilted toward corporations rather than workers and health care providers. Another vote was expected Monday.



The National Guard stands in formation at the Jacob Javits Center, Monday, March 23, 2020, in New York. New York City hospitals are just 10 days from running out of "really basic supplies," Mayor Bill de Blasio said late Sunday. De

Blasio has called upon the federal government to boost the city's quickly dwindling supply of protective equipment. The city also faces a dearth of ventilators to treat those infected by the coronavirus. (AP Photo/John Minchillo)

President Donald Trump suggested that the remedies to fight the epidemic might be more harmful than the outbreak itself and vowed to reassess government restrictions after the U.S. shutdown reaches the 15-day mark.

"WE CANNOT LET THE CURE BE WORSE THAN THE PROBLEM ITSELF," he tweeted.

Democrat presidential candidate Joe Biden criticized Trump for not using the full force of federal authority to combat the virus.

"Trump keeps saying he's a wartime president," Biden said in an online address. "Well, start acting like one."

Worldwide, more than 350,000 people have been infected and 15,000 have died from the virus, according to a running tally kept by Johns Hopkins University. More than 1.5 billion people around the globe have been instructed to stay in their homes.

After just a few weeks, the U.S. has more than 35,000 cases and more than 400 deaths, by Johns Hopkins' count. Indiana, Michigan and West Virginia joined states including California, Illinois and New York in asking or ordering their residents to stay home and keep businesses closed—directives that now cover more than one-third of the U.S. population.



A victim of the Covid-19 virus is evacuated from the Mulhouse civil hospital, eastern France, Monday March 23, 2020. The Grand Est region is now the epicenter of the outbreak in France, which has buried the third most virus victims in Europe, after Italy and Spain. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (AP Photo/Jean-Francois Badias)

Industries big and small continued to shut down. Boeing announced it is suspending production in the Seattle area, where it has two mammoth aircraft plants employing about 42,000 people.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for an immediate cease-fire in conflicts around the world to tackle the pandemic.

"It is time to put armed conflict on lock down and focus together on the true fight of our lives," he said.

Former Hollywood studio boss Harvey Weinstein tested positive at the prison in New York where he is serving a 23-year sentence for rape and sexual assault, the head of the guards union said. German Chancellor Angela Merkel tested negative after putting herself in quarantine, according to a spokesman. Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar, the former presidential candidate, disclosed that her husband has been hospitalized with the virus.



Young passengers wear face masks to protect against the coronavirus as they arrive at the Hong Kong airport, Monday, March 23, 2020. For most, the coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. But for a few, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it

can cause more severe illnesses, including pneumonia. (AP Photo/Kin Cheung)

For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever or coughing. But for some older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. Over 100,000 people have recovered, mostly in China.

Authorities kept up their push to get people to stay home, but some were clearly not listening.

Social media sites showed snapshots of packed London Underground trains. British Health Secretary Matt Hancock described those ignoring the government's social distancing recommendations as "very selfish" and warned that stricter rules might be coming soon.

In New York, Cuomo likewise fumed over gatherings of young people in violation of his order that everyone stay 6 feet apart, saying: "It's reckless and it's violative of your civic spirit and duty as a citizen, as far as I'm concerned."



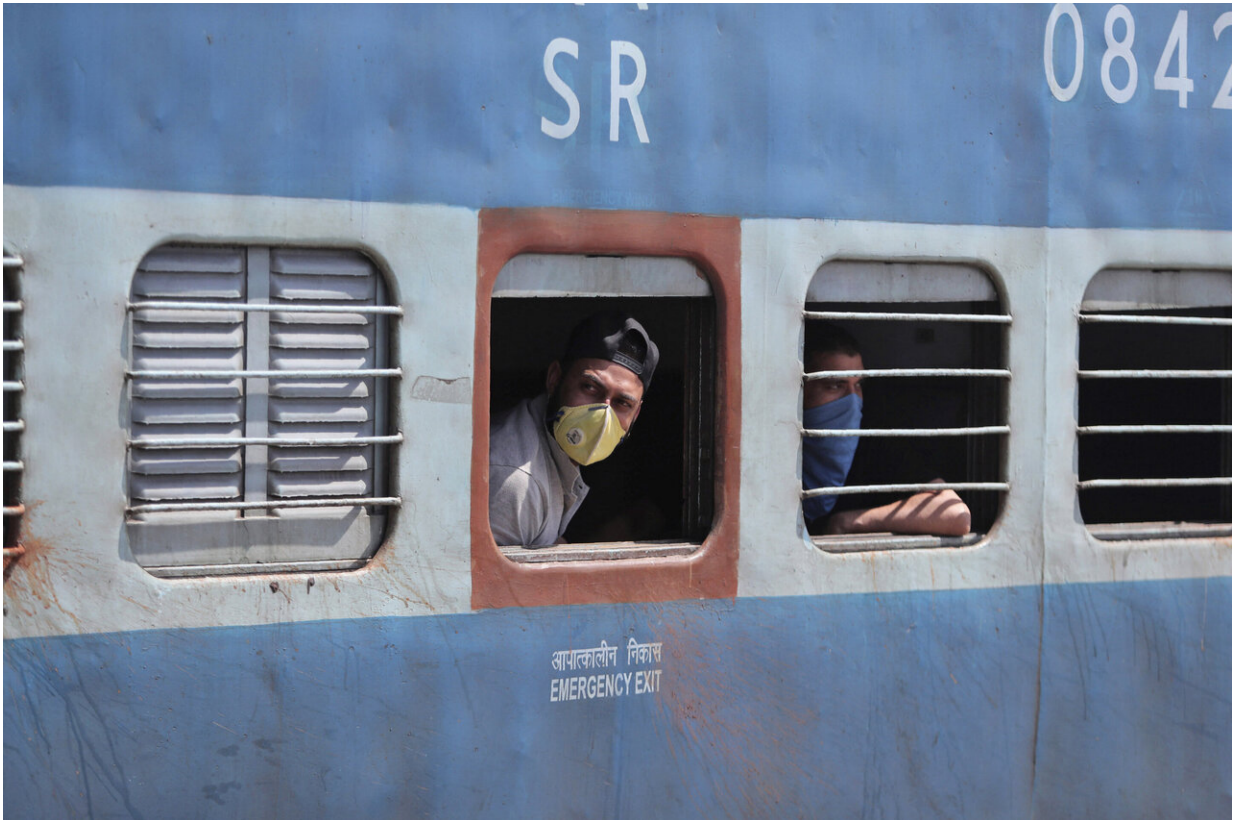
A woman walks her dog under a "don't panic" sign hanging on the entrance of a food market that was shut down in order to reduce the spread of the coronavirus, in Tel Aviv, Israel, Monday, March 23, 2020. In Israel daily life has largely shut down with COVID-19 cases multiplying greatly over the past week. (AP Photo/Oded Balilty)



A countdown clock for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics is reflected in a puddle of water outside Tokyo Station in Tokyo, Monday, March 23, 2020. The IOC will take up to four weeks to consider postponing the Tokyo Olympics amid mounting criticism of its handling of the coronavirus crisis that now includes Canada saying it won't send a team to the games this year and the leader of track and field, the biggest sport at the games, also calling for a delay. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



Cherye Graves, a 4th grade English language arts teacher at Eastside Elementary in Clinton, Miss., walks out of her desolate classroom as students are forced to stay home during the coronavirus outbreak, Monday, March 23, 2020, in Clinton, Miss. Graves' room is decked out with lights and streams of ribbons in an effort she says to promote a fun learning environment for her students. "The main part of this is missing. The reason why we come is not here. It is sad. With the children gone, this means nothing. This adds, but the heart isn't here. Hopefully we'll be able to finish the school year with warm bodies in the classroom." (AP Photo/Julio Cortez)



Passengers wearing masks as a precautionary measure against the new virus are seen inside a train in Jammu, India, Monday, March 23, 2020. Authorities have gradually started to shutdown much of the country of 1.3 billion people to contain the outbreak. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (AP Photo/Channi Anand)



A commuter crosses 42nd Street in front of Grand Central Terminal during morning rush hour, Monday, March 23, 2020, in New York. Gov. Andrew Cuomo has ordered most New Yorkers to stay home from work to slow the coronavirus pandemic. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)



A municipality worker wearing a protective suit sprays water, backdropped by the Ottoman-era Mecidiye mosque and the "July 15th Martyrs' bridge, formerly known as Bosphorus Bridge, over the Bosphorus Strait, separating Europe and Asia, in Ortakoy square in Istanbul, amid the coronavirus outbreak, Monday, March 23, 2020. The COVID-19 illness causes mild or moderate symptoms in most people, but severe symptoms are more likely in the elderly or those with existing health problems. (AP Photo/Emrah Gurel)



A passenger carries her luggage through an almost empty Termini main train station, in Rome, Monday, March 23, 2020. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness, especially in older adults and people with existing health problems.(AP Photo/Andrew Medichini)



People queue for public transport in Harare, Zimbabwe, Monday, March, 23, 2020. Zimbabwe has closed its borders to non essential human traffic following its first recorded coronavirus related death. (AP Photo/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi)

In a city where many people live in buildings with small elevators, a 21-story high-rise in the Chelsea neighborhood posted a notice in the lobby warning that there should be just one person per elevator, and those going to the laundry room shouldn't use a washing machine next to another one in use.

"People are really only going to get food and going back. That's what we need," said Matt Comet, making a brief dash into the nearly empty streets of his Manhattan neighborhood to pick up a carryout meal.

"I'm OK to have a book and watch TV for a bit, but if it continues for another month, another two months, it'll be pretty crazy."

India took the extraordinary step of shutting down the nation's vast rail system, which has long been the lifeblood of the country of 1.3 billion people.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe acknowledged that postponing this year's Summer Olympics in Tokyo could be unavoidable. The International Olympic Committee said it will examine the situation over the next few weeks.

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