

WHO Europe calls for 'boldest actions' to fight pandemic

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The World Health Organization's regional chief for Europe on Tuesday called for the "boldest actions" to fight the coronavirus pandemic sweeping the continent.

COVID-19 has infected more than 71,000 people and killed over 3,330 across Europe, the majority in hard-hit Italy, Spain and France.

Several countries have imposed stringent travel and movement restrictions and closed bars, restaurants and non-essential shops to slow the spread of the virus.

On Tuesday, WHO's regional office said European nations need to take drastic measures to fight the pandemic.

"Every country, with no exceptions, needs to take their boldest actions to stop or slow down the virus threat," Hans Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe, said.

"Thinking that 'this does not concern me,' is not an option," Kluge said.

But speaking to AFP later he said even "draconian measures may not stop, but slow down" the virus—tempering any expectations the illness can be wiped out altogether.

He said the "good news" was that the region was "alert and on guard," noting that "preparedness, readiness and response measures" had been launched in member states.

He urged countries to assess their own circumstances in order to determine which measures should be emphasised since the outbreak is progressing at a different pace in different countries.

But he said some measures should be universally considered.

"Every country should isolate the sick and quarantine their contacts and consider social distancing," Kluge said.

WHO Europe is comprised of 53 countries covering a broad geographic, cultural and economic footprint, from Russia and Andorra to Germany and Tajikistan.

EU leaders on Tuesday held a videoconference summit to discuss a ban on non-essential travel to the bloc.

Some countries have already sealed borders within the bloc, though the EU has discouraged a blanket move to restrict travel in the Schengen passport-free zone.

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