

California goes on virus lockdown as Italy death toll overtakes China

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China reported on Friday a second day with no new domestic cases of the virus since it appeared in the central city of Wuhan in December

California's 40 million people were under lockdown on Friday in the most drastic quarantine efforts by a US state to contain the fast-

spreading coronavirus, as the global toll surged with Italy surpassing China as the country with the most deaths from the pandemic.

The United States was fast-tracking antimalarial drugs for use as a virus treatment, President Donald Trump said, as he lashed out at China for not informing the world earlier about the original outbreak.

China reported a second day with no new domestic cases since the virus appeared in the central city of Wuhan in December, before spreading worldwide.

While there was a glimmer of hope in China, more countries tightened their borders and imposed lockdowns as the UN chief warned "millions" could die if the virus spread unchecked around the globe.

The death toll soared in Europe as Italy announced another 427 fatalities on Thursday, taking its total to 3,405, according to a tally compiled by AFP from official sources.

China has officially reported 3,248 deaths from the virus, which can cause respiratory failure, particularly in the elderly.

Globally, the death toll from the virus has risen to almost 10,000 with more than 232,000 cases in 158 countries and territories, according to the AFP tally.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned Thursday of the virus's potentially devastating effects.

"If we let the virus spread like wildfire—especially in the most vulnerable regions of the world—it would kill millions of people," Guterres said.

COVID-19

World toll on March 19 at 1900 GMT

Countries and territories affected **158**

Deaths		Cases	
9,827	1,043	232,686	23,701
New since March 18 at 1900 GMT			

Worst affected countries

	Deaths		Cases
	total	new	
ITALY	3,405	427	41,035
CHINA mainland	3,245	8	80,928
IRAN	1,284	149	18,407
SPAIN	767	169	17,147
FRANCE	372	108	10,995

Sources: AFP, WHO

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World toll of coronavirus infections and deaths, as of March 19 at 1900 GMT

'Paying a big price'

The number of infections and deaths in the rest of the world has surpassed those in China, which appears to have staunched the virus with strict measures including a complete quarantine of Wuhan since January.

Trump, who has come under fire for his response to the crisis, said Thursday that the world was paying for China's lack of transparency about the outbreak.

"It could have been contained to that one area of China where it started. And certainly the world is paying a big price for what they did," he said.

Trump said US authorities were fast-tracking antimalarials chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine for use as a coronavirus treatment, making them available "almost immediately."

The drugs are synthetic forms of quinine, which has been used to treat malaria for centuries.

As the toll surged in Italy, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said the national lockdown, which has been copied around Europe, would be extended beyond April 3.



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned Thursday the virus could 'kill millions of people' if allowed to spread unchecked

France also mooted extending its two-week lockdown ordered this week by President Emmanuel Macron, as the interior minister blasted "idiots" who flout home confinement rules and put others at risk.

In Argentina, President Alberto Fernandez announced a "preventative and compulsory" lockdown from Friday to March 31, while Brazil's Rio de Janeiro state will close its famed beaches as well as restaurants and bars for 15 days to try to contain the pandemic.

California Governor Gavin Newsom said the state's lockdown would

begin Thursday evening in a "recognition of our interdependence."

In Britain, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the country could "turn the tide" on coronavirus within 12 weeks—but only if people heed advice to avoid social contact.

The disease continued to hit high-profile figures with EU Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier, Monaco's Prince Albert II and at least a half-dozen NBA players in the United States among those testing positive.



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And as the Olympic flame arrived in Japan Friday to a muted reception, Tokyo Games organizers faced renewed calls for the event to be delayed.

"It should be postponed under the current situation where athletes are not well prepared," Japan Olympic Committee member Kaori Yamaguchi told the Nikkei daily in an interview published the day the flame landed.

Emergency stimulus

With countries paralyzed by the pandemic and stock markets imploding, policymakers this week unleashed a wave of measures to shore up the global economy.

The European Central Bank announced a 750-billion-euro bond-buying scheme, dubbed the "big bazooka."

In the United States, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin urged Congress to pass a \$1-trillion emergency stimulus package.

Asian equities enjoyed some much-needed gains Friday after Wall Street finished higher following a volatile session as investors weighed the government stimulus measures against some of the first data pointing to a sharp US economic slowdown.



People around the world are being advised to avoid social contact to stem the spread of the virus

European stocks also staged a rebound on the stimulus news.

The battle is only just beginning across the rest of the world, with the shadow of the virus lengthening across Africa.

The Nigerian mega-city of Lagos announced it would shut its schools while Burkina Faso confirmed the first death in sub-Saharan Africa.

Russia reported its first death and even the Pacific nation of Fiji said it had its first case.

Countries are taking increasingly drastic steps to stem infections, with Australia and New Zealand banning non-residents from arriving.

The United States warned against international travel due to the pandemic and advised citizens to come home if possible.

Britain closed dozens of London Underground stations and shut down schools.

The EU closed its borders to outsiders and in many countries bars, restaurants and most shops have closed their doors until further notice.



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The shadow of the virus is lengthening across Africa

Spain, which is on a near-total lockdown, on Thursday ordered all hotels to close immediately.

Spain has postponed formal funerals and wakes for coronavirus victims in the worst affected areas of Madrid and Barcelona.

Elena Guijarro, a 25-year-old physiotherapist from the capital, was preparing to bury her father while her mother and brother are still ill in hospital with the virus.

"My 60-year-old father died yesterday due to coronavirus," she told

AFP. "We bury him today... (but) we are not allowed to hold a vigil."

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