

Europe's south strains under pandemic; 10,000 die globally

March 20 2020, by Lori Hinnant and Nick Perry



People stand apart as they line up to enter a supermarket in Rome, Friday, March 20, 2020. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (AP Photo/Andrew Medichini)

Southern Europe buckled under the strain of the coronavirus pandemic

Friday, with gasping patients filling sick wards in Spain and Italy and field hospitals going up in hotels and a convention center, as the global death toll surpassed 10,000 people worldwide.

In the U.S., California's governor barred nonessential movement for all 40 million residents, and the Trump administration warned Americans abroad to return home or risk spending an "indefinite" period away. And the income tax filing deadline was moved from April 15 to July 15.

The World Health Organization noted the dramatic speed of the virus' spread.

"It took over three months to reach the first 10,000 confirmed cases and only 12 days to reach the next 100,000," the U.N. health agency said.

In Bergamo, the epicenter of the virus in Italy, cemeteries were overwhelmed. Sky News video from inside the city's main hospital showed patients lined up in a narrow ward, struggling for breath as doctors and nurses moved swiftly from one beeping machine to the next.

"When the virus arrived here, there was no containment and it spread through the valleys very quickly. ... Some said it was the normal flu. We doctors knew it was not," said Dr. Luca Lorini, head of intensive care at the hospital, where nearly 500 beds were dedicated to people suffering severe symptoms of the virus, 80 of those in intensive care.



A view of the ICU of the emergency field hospital that is being set up outside Cremona hospital, northern Italy, Friday, March 20, 2020. A Christian evangelical group headed by the son of the late televangelist Billy Graham has sent a field hospital to northern Italy to tend to coronavirus patients, joining China in offering aid to Italy's overwhelmed health care system. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (Claudio Furlan/LaPresse via AP)

In the farm town of Fondi that has the largest wholesale produce market serving Rome and Naples, a new ordinance banned all but essential people from entering or leaving after 40 elderly residents became infected. At a convent on the outskirts of Rome, 19 of 21 nuns were infected, according to the Italian daily *Il Messaggero*. The Vatican published a decree absolving the sins of the faithful who are sick or in

quarantine as well as their caregivers if they met certain conditions.

Wuhan, China, where the outbreak began, offered a ray of hope with no new infections reported for a second day in a row and only 39 cases reported nationwide—all of them brought from the outside, the government said.

The effects of a global economy grinding to a halt were also taking a toll, from millions of unsold flowers rotting in piles in Kenya to the slow emptying of the world's skies. The U.N. chief warned of a looming global recession "perhaps of record dimensions."



Customers wearing protective masks and gloves wait in line at a Stop & Shop supermarket that opened special morning hours to serve people 60-years and older due to coronavirus concerns, Friday, March 20, 2020, in Teaneck, N.J. For

most people, COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus, causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. (AP Photo/John Minchillo)

Scientists advising the British government warned that restrictions on daily life may have to be in place for a year, with periods of less stringent and more stringent measures.

In the U.S., Congress worked to put together a \$1 trillion emergency package that would prop up industry and [small business](#) and dispense relief checks to households of \$1,200 for adults and \$500 per child.

In a measure of how the fortunes of East and West have shifted, a Chinese Red Cross official heading an aid delegation to Milan castigated Italians for failing to take their national lockdown seriously. Sun Shuopeng said he was shocked to see so many people walking around, using public transportation and eating out in hotels, adding: "All people should be staying at home in quarantine."

China also sent medical equipment to the Czech capital, Prague.



A member of Indonesian Red Cross receives assistance from a colleague to adjust his protective suit as they prepare to disinfect Cipinang Prison compound to prevent the spread of new coronavirus outbreak, in Jakarta, Indonesia, Friday, March 20, 2020. The vast majority of people recover from the new coronavirus. According to the World Health Organization, most people recover in about two to six weeks, depending on the severity of the illness. (AP Photo/Achmad Ibrahim)

Governments are trying to balance locking down residents with the need to keep food, medicine and other essentials flowing. In Britain, the category of vital workers includes doctors, nurses and paramedics—and also vicars, truckers, garbage collectors and journalists.

French President Emmanuel Macron urged employees to keep working

in supermarkets, production sites and other necessary businesses amid stringent movement restrictions.

"We need to keep the country running," Macron said.

Worldwide, the death toll from COVID-19 passed 10,000 and infections exceeded 244,000, according to a Johns Hopkins University tally. Italy, with 60 million citizens, has recorded 3,405 deaths, exceeding the 3,248 in China, a country with a population over 20 times larger. Spain, second behind Italy in Europe, reported 1,002 deaths and 19,980 infections. The U.S. death toll rose to 206.



Vesselin Mareshki, right, leader of Bulgarian Political party Volya, and an MP from from his party wear protective suits during Parliamentary session in the

Bulgarian National Assembly in Sofia, Bulgaria, on Friday March 20, 2020. For some people the COVID-19 coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, but for some it can cause very severe illness.(AP Photo/Vesselin Borishev)

"Certain medical centers are suffering stress that is reaching the limit," said Fernando Simón, director of Spain's center for health alerts and emergencies. "The difficult days in which we must bear down are coming now. We must keep our focus."

A convention center and hotels were being prepared as field hospitals for nearly 10,000 beds in Madrid, and France's military worked to build a makeshift medical center in the country's hard-hit eastern town of Mulhouse.

Although the illness is mild in most people, the elderly are particularly susceptible to serious symptoms. Italy has the world's second-oldest population, and the vast majority of its dead—87%—were over 70.

Jonas Schmidt-Chanasit, a virologist at Germany's Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine, offered another reason for Italy's high mortality rate: "That's what happens when the health system collapses."



An member of the group 'Pause the System' wears a face mask as she protests in front of the entrance to Downing Street in London, Friday, March 20, 2020. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. (AP Photo/Frank Augstein)



A worker wearing protective gears disinfects as a precaution against the new coronavirus at a shopping district in Seoul, South Korea, Friday, March 20, 2020. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man)



Muslim men perform Friday prayer at the distance of about one meter (3 ft) to each other as a social distancing effort to prevent the spread of new coronavirus outbreak at Al Akbar mosque in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia, Friday, March 20, 2020. The vast majority of people recover from the new coronavirus. According to the World Health Organization, most people recover in about two to six weeks, depending on the severity of the illness. (AP Photo/Trisnadi)



A women beats a cooking top in Geneva, Switzerland, Friday, March 20, 2020 during the 'Switzerland says thank you' campaign to thank paramedics who fight against the new coronavirus and the COVID-19 disease. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (Martial Trezzini/Keystone via AP)



A worker sprays disinfectant as a precaution against the new coronavirus at Chatuchak Market in Bangkok, Thailand, Friday, March 20, 2020. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)



People walk across near empty Charles Bridge in Prague, Czech Republic, Friday, March 20, 2020. The Czech Republic's government has approved further dramatic measures to try and stem the spread of the novel coronavirus called COVID-19. The Prague castle is in the background. (AP Photo/Petr David Josek)



People wear face masks as they walk through an office complex in Beijing, Friday, March 20, 2020. Italy's deaths from the coronavirus pandemic eclipsed China's on Thursday as the scourge extended its march across the West, where the United States and other countries increasingly enlisted the military to prepare for an onslaught of patients and California's governor ordered people in the most-populous U.S. state to stay home. The virus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough, for most people, but severe illness is more likely in the elderly and people with existing health problems. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)



South Korean police officers wearing face masks move as they guard near the U.S. embassy in Seoul, South Korea, Friday, March 20, 2020. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)



A member of the health service at Txagorritxu hospital walks along the perimeter of the hospital, in Vitoria, northern Spain, Vitoria, northern Spain, March 20, 2020. Spain will mobilize 200 billion euros or the equivalent to one fifth of the country's annual output in loans, credit guarantees and subsidies for workers and vulnerable citizens, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez announced Tuesday. 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/Alvaro Barrientos)

More than 86,000 people have recovered, mostly in China. Recovery takes two weeks or so for mild cases but can be up to six weeks for those that turn serious, according to the WHO.

Iran's official toll of more than 1,400 deaths was rising quickly as well

amid fears it is underreporting its cases. Tehran accused Washington of helping spread the virus by retaining sanctions that prevent it importing desperately needed medicine and [medical equipment](#).

"While the U.S. is trying to curb the virus internally, it is helping the spread of the virus externally," Iran's U.N. mission said in a statement.

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