

France seizes control of masks; Europeans close more schools

March 3 2020, by Lori Hinnant



In this photo taken on Monday, March 2, 2020, Ukrainian Chief sanitary and epidemiological doctor Viktor Liashko attend a briefing in Kyiv, Ukraine. Liashko has just reported its first confirmed case of the new COVID-19 coronavirus, saying a man who recently arrived from Italy was diagnosed with the virus.(AP Photo/Efrem Lukatsky)

France requisitioned protective masks and sent tens of thousands of students home from school, Norway blocked 1,200 passengers on a cruise ship and Spain isolated dozens of health workers as the new coronavirus spread further Tuesday into Europe.

With the new coronavirus taking firmer hold in Europe, the continent is facing many of the same complications seen in Asia weeks ago. Flights to Italy, and especially Milan and Venice, were dropping nearly by the hour, with announcements from Finnish and Swedish carriers that they were suspending flights for at least two weeks.

Travelers from northern Italy, along with South Korea and Iran, now face a ban in Singapore and will not be allowed entry or even to transit through the country. And Saudi Arabia advised citizens and residents to postpone travel to Germany and France due to the spread of the coronavirus in those countries.

Around 120 French schools were ordered to close, most in Brittany and the Oise region north of Paris, which have been hit hard by COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus.

Italy closed schools in the hard-hit regions of Lombardy and Veneto last week, and announced the closure of schools in the Emilia Romagna region last weekend. All student outings have been canceled nationwide, including off-site after-school activities. In addition, a handful of schools are closed or under quarantine in Germany and even in Poland, which has no confirmed cases of the disease so far.

French President Emmanuel Macron announced in a tweet that the government was requisitioning all current and future stocks of protective masks in order to ensure their distribution to virus patients and health workers.

France's education minister, Jean-Michel Blanquer, told LCI television that more schools could close and confirmed that he had ordered a freeze on all school trips. But he cautioned against rushing to a general shutdown of the education system.



A tourist wearing a mask walks away from the Louvre museum in Paris, Monday, March 2, 2020. The Louvre Museum was closed again Monday as management was meeting with staff worried about the spread of the new virus in the world's most-visited museum. (AP Photo/Christophe Ena)

"It wouldn't make sense to confine everyone at home, to paralyze the country," he said.

Around 100 health workers were being kept under isolation in northern Spain and at least 120 more were being closely watched by authorities after at least five doctors and nurses were infected in hospitals, said the Basque health regional minister, Nekane Murga. Health authorities in northern Spain were also speeding up the hiring of new doctors to help a possible shortage of health professionals in the coming months, Murga said.

British authorities laid out plans Tuesday to confront a COVID-19 epidemic, saying that the new coronavirus could spread within weeks from a few dozen confirmed cases to millions of infections, with thousands of people in the U.K. at risk of death.

Officials hope the most drastic measures won't be needed. Britain may not be able to stop the virus, but it has one vital advantage in fighting it: a head start. The country only has 51 cases so far.

In Haugesund, southern Norway, a German cruise ship with 1,200 passengers was blocked overnight while awaiting the results of two passengers tested for the virus, Norwegian broadcaster NRK said. The Aida Aura was supposed to leave Monday but was still in Haugesund on Tuesday and passengers were being kept on board. The ship's operator later said the two German passengers tested negative and the ship hoped to be underway soon.

The Geneva International Motor Show resorted to putting automakers' product unveilings and news conferences online Tuesday after this year's show was canceled. BMW presented its sleek i4 electric concept car at a digital news conference from Munich, while competitors Daimler and Volkswagen held their own online events.

At Paris Fashion Week, Chanel's fall collection was streamed online for the many VIPs and fashion editors who stayed away. Some of those who

showed up in person donned CC-branded face masks.

Ukraine reported its first confirmed case of the new virus in a man who had recently arrived from Italy, the epicenter of the outbreak in Europe.

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