

France closes Louvre as virus cases mount in Europe

March 1 2020, by Caroline Taix and Juliette Collen With Afp Bureaux



The Louvre museum in Paris, the world's most visited, was closed over virus fears

France's famed Louvre museum closed Sunday as coronavirus cases mounted across Europe and beyond, with the global death toll nearing

3,000.

The virus has now infected more than 88,000 people and spread to more than 60 countries around the world, well beyond the epicentre in China where it first emerged late last year.

It has rattled global markets and prompted unprecedented measures from governments scrambling to contain the outbreak, which the World Health Organization has warned could become a pandemic.

The United States and Australia marked grim milestones over the weekend with their first coronavirus fatalities, while China reported 573 new infections Sunday, the highest figure in a week after a dip.

While the numbers in China are still far lower than the huge daily increases reported during the first two weeks of February, COVID-19 has spread rapidly across borders, with South Korea, Italy and Iran emerging as hotspots.

The Louvre, the world's most visited museum, was shuttered Sunday after staff refused to open the museum over coronavirus fears.

Some tourists turning up Sunday afternoon complained they had booked their tickets that same morning with no warning of the closure.



The new coronavirus has spread to more than 60 countries around the world

France, which has 130 confirmed cases and two deaths from COVID-19, said it would ban gatherings of 5,000 people or more, closing schools and cancelling religious services in some of the hardest-hit zones. Sunday's half-marathon in Paris was cancelled.

Two confirmed cases in France on Sunday were children, aged one and five, and their 27-year-old mother in the eastern city of Strasbourg. No children under 10 years old are reported to have died from the virus.

In recent days, the epidemic has spread to sub-Saharan Africa, while Armenia and the Czech Republic reported their first cases on Sunday,

and cases in Germany doubled.

Qatar, Ecuador, Luxembourg and Ireland all confirmed their first cases on Saturday as the virus continued its global march beyond China's borders.

Markets tumble

Fears are mounting that the disease could hammer the global economy.

Stock markets in the oil-rich Gulf states plunged Sunday after global bourses were battered last week, diving to their lowest levels since the 2008 financial crisis.



The coronavirus outbreak has impacted a number of major sports events,

including top-level football matches in Europe

China's economy has also been hit as factories have shut and millions of people stayed home after the government imposed lockdown measures across entire swathes of the country.

Europe's hardest hit country Italy said Sunday it would deliver 3.6 billion euros (\$4 billion) in emergency aid to sectors affected by the virus.

Italy clocked a spike in new cases Saturday, bringing the total number of infections to above 1,000, with 29 deaths.

The outbreak also forced the postponement of five matches in Italy's top-flight Serie A football league, including the heavyweight clash between champions Juventus and Inter Milan.

The season-opening Qatar MotoGP, scheduled for March 8, was cancelled, organisers said.

Pence defends US response to virus

Australia reported the first death on its soil—a 78-year-old man evacuated from the coronavirus-stricken Diamond Princess cruise ship in Japan.



President Donald Trump said the United States is prepared to handle the coronavirus outbreak, and that there is 'no reason to panic at all'

On Saturday, the US also announced its first coronavirus death, though US President Donald Trump insisted the country was prepared and called for calm.

On Sunday, Vice President Mike Pence defended the US administration from criticism that it had been slow to react to the threat of the virus, crediting Trump with having acted quickly to quarantine Americans brought back from China and Japan.

Officials also announced a possible outbreak in a Washington state

nursing home, where a health worker and a resident in her 70s were both confirmed sick with the virus.

Other residents and staff were "ill with respiratory symptoms or hospitalised with pneumonia of unknown cause", the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said.

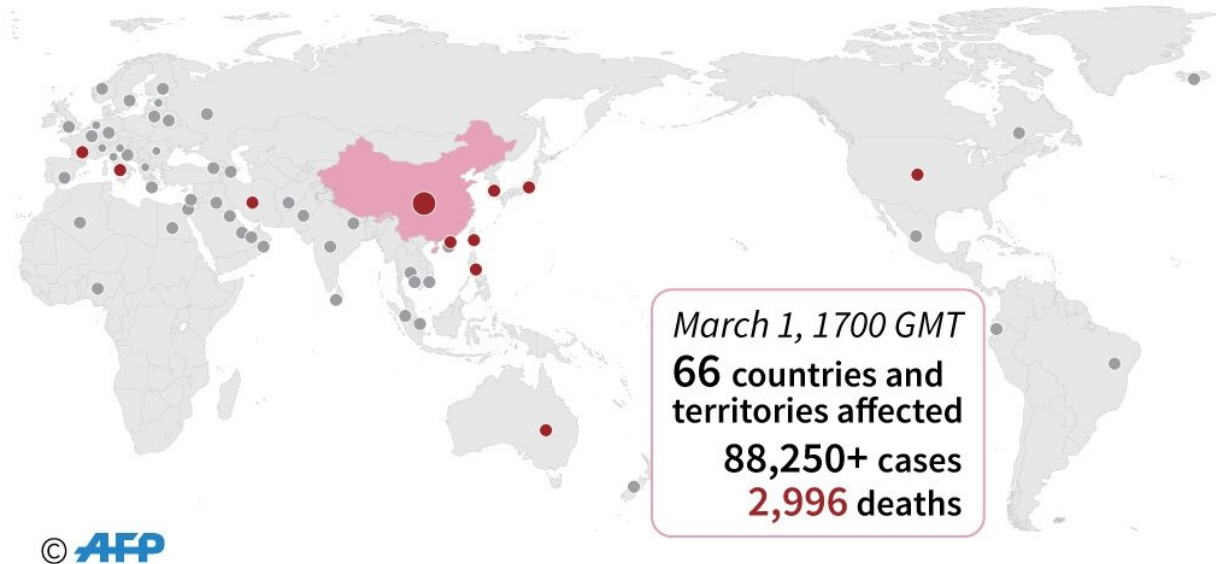
The death and two confirmed Washington cases all involved patients who had not travelled overseas or come in contact with anyone known to be ill, indicating that the virus was spreading in the US.

"We will see more cases," Health Secretary Alex Azar said at the White House.

"But it's important to remember, for the vast majority of individuals who contract the novel coronavirus, they will experience mild to moderate symptoms."

Spread of coronavirus

● Deaths ● Confirmed cases



Countries and territories with confirmed cases of coronavirus and deaths as of March 1

Risk factors

China on Sunday reported 573 new infections, the highest figure in a week after a dip. All but three of them were in Hubei province, of which Wuhan is the capital.

Despite the increase, China said its response to the epidemic "continues to be good" though risks remained.

"The next step is to focus on the risks brought by the resumption of work and the increasing number of foreign cases," said Mi Feng, spokesman at the National Health Commission.

In nearby South Korea, the epidemic is centred in its fourth-largest city, Daegu, whose streets have been largely deserted for days, apart from long queues at the few shops with masks for sale.

The total in South Korea is expected to rise further as authorities screen more than 210,000 members of the Shincheonji Church of Jesus, a secretive entity often accused of being a cult that is linked to around half of the country's cases.

Iran, one of the worst affected countries in the world, said Sunday it had 978 infections and 54 deaths.

Several countries banned travel to and from Iran as its cases quickly mounted over the past week.

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