

Germany says widespread testing keeping virus deaths low

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Germany is testing up to 500,000 people a week for the new coronavirus, a virologist said Thursday, adding that early detection has been key in keeping the country's death rate relatively low.

The country has more than 36,000 declared cases of the virus, among the highest in Europe, but has managed to avoid the high death rates seen in

hard-hit Italy and Spain.

Experts say widespread testing and tracing of COVID-19 cases is key to limiting the spread of the disease, an approach adopted in South Korea and Singapore where the outbreak has largely been contained.

In Germany, virologist Christian Drosten said it had helped to keep the death rate under control.

"The reason why Germany has so few deaths compared to the number of infected people can be explained by the fact that we carry out an extremely large number of laboratory [diagnostic tests](#)," said Drosten, who heads the Institute of Virology at Berlin's Charite University Hospital.

"Estimates from the last days show that we are carrying out half a million tests a week," he said.

He added that a vast network of laboratories across the country had helped with the widespread testing.

Germany's [health minister](#) confirmed that between 300,000 and 500,000 tests were carried out in Germany last week alone, with about 10 percent coming back positive.

"That's likely to be the most tests of any country in the world, in both absolute and relative terms," Jens Spahn said.

Among Germany's population of 83 million people, 36,508 are confirmed infected, including 198 who have died from the disease, according to official data compiled by the disease control agency Robert Koch Institute.

Search for treatment

At 0.54 percent, Germany's death rate is far lower than Italy's rate of around 10 percent and Spain's fatality rate of 7.3 percent. France's [death](#) rate is about 5.2 percent.

Besides the large-scale testing, experts in Germany also said that the virus has largely affected a younger, healthier section of the population compared to elsewhere.

At the same time, experts have repeatedly warned that in the country where almost a quarter of the population is over 60, the number of deaths could still skyrocket if people do not stick to measures to help halt contagion.

Lockdown measures are in place across Germany, preventing people from leaving their homes except for essential trips, while most shops, restaurants and bars are closed.

Berlin's research ministry said it would commit 150 million euros (\$164 million) to improve communication between hospitals and laboratories about [coronavirus](#) patients' health data, hoping the [information exchange](#) could feed into development of a vaccine.

Drosten suggested that some rules on clinical research could be loosened in the search for a coronavirus treatment.

But he downplayed the use of anti-malarial drug chloroquine—hyped by US President Donald Trump—for infected patients.

"There are substances that are much more promising," he said, using the example of Favipiravir, a flu medication.

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