

Global virus death toll tops 3,000 as second man dies in US

March 2 2020, by Laurent Thomet



The virus has now infected more than 88,000 people and spread to more than 60 countries after first emerging in China late last year

The global death toll from the new coronavirus epidemic surpassed 3,000 on Monday after dozens more died at its epicentre in China and cases soared around the world, with a second fatality on US soil.

The virus has now infected more than 89,000 people and spread to over 60 countries after first emerging in China late last year.

A second person died in the northwestern US state of Washington as President Donald Trump, who has downplayed the risk of a major outbreak, faced criticism over his administration's preparedness.

South Korea, the biggest nest of infections outside China, reported nearly 500 new cases on Monday, raising its total past 4,000.

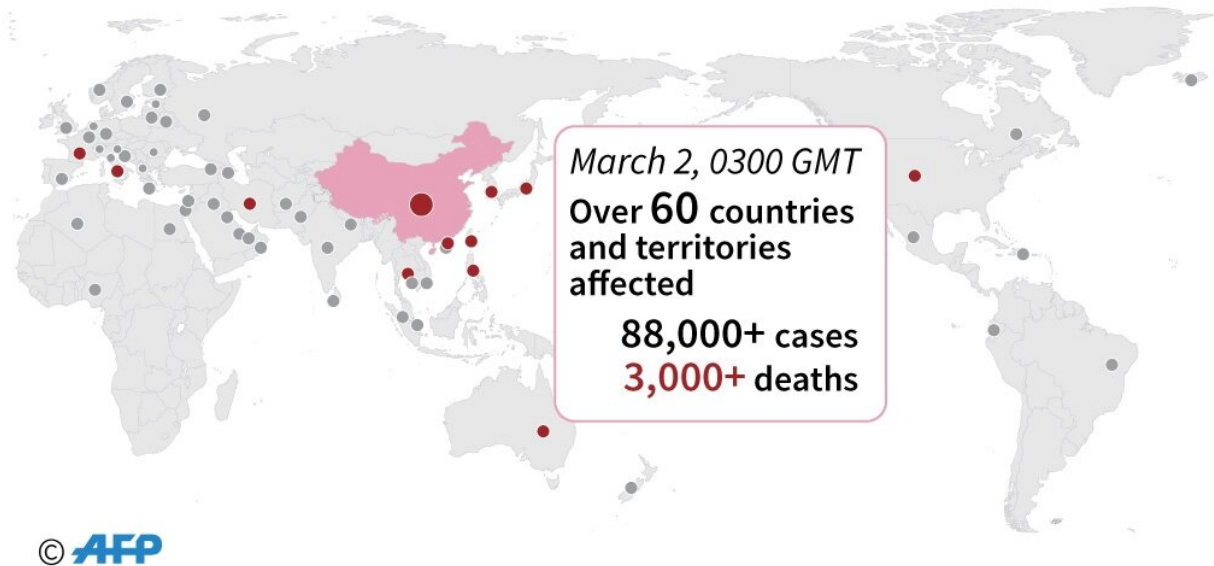
Half of South Korea's cases are linked to a sect whose leader apologised Monday for the spread of the disease. Seoul's city government asked prosecutors to press murder charges against him.

With fears of a pandemic on the rise, the World Health Organization urged all countries to stock up on critical care ventilators to treat patients with severe symptoms of the deadly respiratory illness.

The rapid spread of the coronavirus has raised fears over its impact on the world economy, with G7 and eurozone finance ministers planning phone talks Wednesday to coordinate their response after global stocks tanked last week.

Spread of coronavirus

● Deaths ● Confirmed cases



Countries and territories with confirmed cases of coronavirus and deaths as of March 2, 0300 GMT.

China's economy has ground to a halt with large swathes of the country under quarantine or measures to restrict travel. Takings at Macau casinos fell a record 88 percent in February.

Other countries have started to enact their own draconian containment measures, including banning arrivals from virus-hit nations, locking down towns, urging citizens to stay home and suspending major events such as football matches and trade fairs.

The Louvre—the world's most visited museum—closed on Sunday after staff refused to work over fears about the virus.

China reported 42 more deaths on Monday—all in central Hubei province. The pathogen is believed to have originated in a market that sold wild animals in Hubei's capital, Wuhan.

The death toll in China alone rose to 2,912, but it is also surging abroad, with the second-highest tally in Iran, at 54.

The WHO says the virus appears to particularly hit those over the age of 60 and people already weakened by other illness. It has a mortality rate ranging between two and five percent.

Infections are now rising faster abroad than in China, as the country's drastic measures, including quarantining some 56 million people in Hubei since late January, appear to be paying off.



In a stark example of growing global anxiety, the Louvre, the world's most visited museum, closed on Sunday after staff refused to work over fears about the virus

Infections double in Italy

After an increase on Sunday, China's National Health Commission reported 202 new infections on Monday, the lowest daily rise since late January, bringing the nationwide total over 80,000.

In a symbol of the improving situation, authorities in Wuhan closed on Sunday one of 16 makeshift hospitals that were hastily built or repurposed from public buildings to treat the city's huge number of patients.

By contrast, infections nearly doubled over the weekend in Italy, Europe's hardest-hit country with almost 1,700 cases.

Four more people died in South Korea, taking its toll to 22.

South Korea's cases are expected to rise further as authorities test more than 260,000 people associated with the Shincheonji Church of Jesus, a religious group often condemned as a cult that is linked to more than half the infections.



A man wearing a face mask uses an escalator in Tokyo's Ginza district

"I would like to offer my sincere apology to the people on behalf of the members," said Shincheonji's 88-year-old head Lee Man-hee, his voice breaking at a press conference where he got down on his knees twice to bow.

Seoul's city government has asked prosecutors to press charges, including murder, against him and 11 other sect leaders for failing to cooperate in containing the spread of the virus.

Lee insisted that the group was "actively cooperating with the government".

US criticism

In the United States, a man in his 70s with underlying conditions died on Saturday, health officials said, as New York reported its first case in a woman who had visited Iran.

It is the second death in both Washington state and King County.

The first victim was one of a handful with no known links to global hot zones to have contracted the virus—indicating that the pathogen is now likely spreading in communities.



Kim Shin-chang, a Shincheonji Church of Jesus, official wearing a face mask during an interview with AFP. The church is linked to more than half the

coronavirus infections in SOuth Korea

Vice President Mike Pence and Health Secretary Alex Azar defended the administration's handling of the virus, while seeking to reassure Americans and promising to make up for shortfalls in virus testing kits.

"We could have more sad news, but the American people should know the risk to the average American remains low," Pence told CNN.

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