

# Global virus infections top 200,000 as nations tighten clampdowns

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The number of global coronavirus infections shot past 200,000 on Wednesday, as governments across Europe, North America and Asia rolled out tough measures to put the brakes on the ferocious spread of

the deadly pandemic.

Worldwide fatalities topped 8,000 and more deaths have now been recorded in Europe, the new virus epicentre, than in Asia since the outbreak first emerged in China in December.

The World Health Organization called the disease an "enemy against humanity", urging a collective response to fight the global outbreak.

"This coronavirus is presenting us with an unprecedented threat," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said Wednesday.

From Australia to Britain and the United States, governments across the world have imposed tough containment measures, forcing unprecedented social change and sending financial markets into a tailspin.

The European Union sealed its borders on Wednesday, barring travellers from outside the bloc for 30 days to try to slow the rapid spread of the virus.

Europe has now recorded 4,023 deaths—including 2,978 in Italy which recorded its highest single day toll Wednesday—leapfrogging Asia's 3,384 fatalities, according to an AFP tally.

There are more than 84,000 cases across Europe, with Italy, Spain and France leading infections and fatalities.

## **'Wartime president'**

As the spectre of a deep global recession looms large, London and Washington announced massive economic stimulus packages after coming under fire over their response to the crisis.

But financial markets were unimpressed, with European and Asian stocks sinking on Wednesday before trading was suspended on Wall Street following sharp drops.

And the International Labour Organization warned that the pandemic could leave up to 25 million more people out of work and drastically slash workers' incomes.

US President Donald Trump said the White House was discussing a "substantial" spending bill with Congress that would include immediate cash payments to Americans.

Officials did not give hard numbers but The Washington Post reported the amount could reach \$850 billion, with a chunk destined for airlines fearing ruin.

On Wednesday Trump downplayed fears the US unemployment rate could spike to 20 percent, saying it was an "absolute total worst-case scenario" after his treasury secretary reportedly issued the warning.

But still, he conceded the US was in a "very tough situation" as it battles the outbreak.

"I view (myself) as a, in a sense, a wartime president. I mean, that's what we're fighting," he told reporters at the White House.

Britain on Tuesday unveiled a loan package for businesses struggling in the sudden economic paralysis caused by mass self-quarantine, following similar moves by France and Germany.

London also announced all schools would close from Friday, along with new sweeping emergency powers including proposals allowing police to detain potentially infected people for tests.

Some supermarkets in the country issued purchase quotas and special shopping hours for seniors after shelves were stripped bare following a bout of panic-buying.

## **'Unprecedented' education challenge**

The EU warned of long-term ripples from the virus as it imposed new travel restrictions, the most significant emergency measure from Brussels, which has struggled to develop a unified response.

EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen told Germany's Bild newspaper that politicians had initially underestimated the virus threat.

"But now it is clear that this is a virus that will keep us busy for a long time yet," she said. "We understand that measures that seemed drastic two or three weeks ago, need to be taken now."

Within the bloc some countries have sealed borders, while bars, restaurants and most shops have closed their doors until further notice, grinding life in Europe's normally bustling cities to a halt.

Some 850 million youngsters have been kept home globally—about half the world's student population—according to UNESCO.

"The scale and speed of the school and university closures represents an unprecedented challenge for the education sector," it said.

Trump said the US-Canada border would close for non-essential travel—but assured trade would continue unfettered—later adding the measure could be lifted in 30 days.

Meanwhile, Australia's government urged citizens to not travel abroad and banned gatherings of more than 100 people as cases topped 500.

The WHO has called for "aggressive" action in Southeast Asia to combat the virus after it was largely spared alarming case numbers clocked elsewhere in the region early on.

Malaysia has already banned travellers from overseas, while Vietnam has blocked visitors from several European nations.

## **Africa must 'wake up'**

Asian hotspots China and South Korea have seen new infections and deaths level out in recent weeks—China reported just one new domestic case for the second consecutive day.

In a sign of the shifting hotspot, China said Wednesday it would send two million masks and 50,000 coronavirus testing kits to the EU to help countries battle the outbreak.

Africa, with its fragile healthcare systems, has also recorded nearly 600 cases—with numbers quickly climbing in South Africa—and Burkina Faso reported the first confirmed death in sub-Saharan Africa.

WHO's Tedros said Wednesday the continent must "wake up" and "prepare for worst" in the face of the virus.

Latin America has more than 1,300 recorded infections and the continent's most populated country Brazil announced its first fatality.

## **Eurovision, Glastonbury scrapped**

Every sector from tourism to food to aviation is affected as the global economy effectively goes into shutdown.

The outbreak has also shredded the global sporting and cultural calendar.

In football, the European and Copa America championships have been postponed until next year, and the French Open tennis tournament has been delayed to the autumn.

The Tokyo Olympics still hang in the balance.

The International Olympic Committee acknowledged there was no "ideal" solution, after some top athletes said they were being forced to take health risks should the summer extravaganza go ahead.

Both the Eurovision Song Contest and the annual Glastonbury music festival in England have been axed as well.

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