

US has most infections as virus tightens grip on the world

March 27 2020, by Bernard Condon, David Rising and Nicole Winfield



Volunteers with the Red Cross sort homemade face masks meant to be sterilized and distributed among people in need in Prague, Czech Republic, Friday, March 27, 2020. In Czech Republic it is mandatory that all people must cover their mouths and noses in public to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus called COVID-19. Improvised methods such as a scarf or homemade mask are allowed. The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death. (AP Photo/Petr David Josek)

U.S. coronavirus infections surged to top the world amid warnings that the pandemic is accelerating in cities like New York, Chicago and Detroit, while a record \$2.2 trillion emergency package neared final approval Friday by Congress to help millions of newly unemployed Americans and struggling companies.

The situation in countries with even more fragile health care systems grew more dire on Friday. Russia, Indonesia and South Africa all passed the 1,000-infection mark and South Africa began a three-week lockdown. India launched a massive program to help feed hungry day laborers after a lockdown of the country's 1.3 billion people put them out of work.

In France, a 16-year-old student became the youngest person in the country to die from the virus. Her sister, Manon, spoke out in the French media, saying that Julie was hospitalized Monday after developing a "slight cough" last week, then died Tuesday at the Necker children's hospital in Paris.

"We must stop believing that this only affects the elderly," said Manon, who did not reveal her surname. "No one is invincible against this mutant virus."

France has reported more than 1,600 deaths so far amid 29,000 infections.

The U.S. now has more than 85,000 confirmed cases, and Italy was set to pass China's 81,782 infections later Friday. The three countries account for 46% of the world's nearly 540,000 infections and more than half of its acknowledged virus deaths.



A police officer chases a man who violated the lockdown downtown Johannesburg, South Africa, Friday, March 27, 2020. Police and army started patrolling moments after South Africa went into a nationwide lockdown for 21 days in an effort to mitigate the spread to the coronavirus. The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death.(AP Photo/Jerome Delay)

Analysts, however warned that all those infection figures could be low for reasons that varied in each nation.

"China numbers can't be trusted because the government lies," American political scientist Ian Bremmer, president of the Euraisa Group think-tank, said Friday in a tweet. "U.S. numbers can't be trusted because the

government can't produce enough tests."

Italian epidemiologists warn that the country's numbers are likely much higher than reported—perhaps five times as higher—although two weeks into a nationwide lockdown the daily increase seems to be slowing, at least in northern Italy.

"It's a horrible sensation, not being able to breathe," said Fausto Russo, a 38-year-old fitness trainer who is one of 10,000 Italians whose infection has been cured. "Imagine putting your head under water."



Red Cross workers prepare emergency relief kits packed with basic necessities including instant food for delivery to impoverished people experiencing difficulties amid the spread of the new coronavirus at a facility of the Korean National Red Cross in Seoul, South Korea, Friday, March 27, 2020. For most

people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)

Health care workers grew increasingly angry at the lack of protective equipment.

"Our emergency room was like a petri dish," said Benny Mathew, a nurse at New York's Montefiore Medical Center who heard Thursday he had COVID-19 and is now worried he may infect his wife and two daughters.

"I'm angry. We could have secured enough personal protective equipment months ago. It was happening in China since December," he said. "But we thought it was never going to happen here."

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. But for others, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, the virus can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

The worldwide death toll climbed to over 24,000, according to Johns Hopkins University but more than 124,000 people have recovered, about half in China.



Members of the Protection Civile with protective mask Vincent Jactel, left, and Aurore Lejeune, right, escort a pregnant 27 year old woman suspected of having the coronavirus infection to an ambulance in Paris, Thursday, March 26, 2020. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. (AP Photo/Michel Euler)

New York state, the epicenter of the U.S. outbreak., reported 100 more deaths in one day, accounting for almost 30% of the 1,300 fatalities nationwide. Gov. Andrew Cuomo said the number of deaths will increase soon as critically ill patients who have been on ventilators for days succumb.

"That is a situation where people just deteriorate over time," Cuomo said.

The White House's coronavirus response coordinator, Deborah Birx, said counties in the Midwest around Chicago and Detroit are seeing a rapid increase in cases.

Washington, D.C., confirmed 36 new cases, raising its total to 267. The district is under a state of emergency, its major attractions like the Smithsonian museums and National Zoo closed and White House and Capitol tours cancelled. Police have blocked off streets, bridges and traffic circles to prevent crowds from coming to see Washington's blooming cherry blossom trees.



Master baker Simon Fritz accepts cash from a customer at the window of the improvised drive-in of his bakery with the help of a self-construction, in Weil am Rhein, Germany Thursday, March 26, 2020. The retail trade is already struggling with the consequences of the new coronavirus epidemic and the associated slump in sales. (Philipp von Ditfurth/dpa via AP)

Russian authorities ramped up testing this week after widespread criticism of insufficient screening.

The stay-home order for India's 1.3 billion people threw out of work the backbone of the nation's economy—rickshaw drivers, fruit peddlers, cleaners and others who buy food with their daily earnings. The government announced a \$22 billion stimulus to deliver monthly rations to 800 million people.

India's massive train system was also halted to stop the spread of the virus but that might not work. Jobless workers are now attempting to walk hundreds of miles to their home villages from India's major cities.

In China, where the virus was first believed to have started, the National Health Commission on Friday reported 55 new cases, 54 of them imported infections. Once again, there were no new cases reported in Wuhan, the provincial capital where the [coronavirus](#) first emerged in December. China is barring most foreigners from entering.



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In a phone call Friday, Chinese leader Xi Jinping told U.S. President Donald Trump that China "understands the United States' current predicament over the COVID-19 outbreak and stands ready to provide support within its capacity."

The two countries should "work together to boost cooperation in

epidemic control and other fields, and develop a relationship of non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation," the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

The pandemic appears to have peaked in China, even while the government remains on guard against imported cases. Beijing is sending medical teams and equipment abroad, especially to Europe. But it has strongly protested U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's repeated references to the outbreak as the "Wuhan Flu," saying that promotes bias against China and Chinese Americans.



Passengers wait for transport being arranged by the government during lockdown in Jammu, India, Friday, March 27, 2020. Some of India's legions of poor and others suddenly thrown out of work by a nationwide stay-at-home order began receiving aid on Thursday, as both public and private groups worked to blunt the

impact of efforts to curb the coronavirus pandemic. India's finance ministry announced a 1.7 trillion (\$22 billion) economic stimulus package that will include delivering grains and lentil rations for three months to 800 million people, some 60% of the world's second-most populous country. (AP Photo/Channi Anand)



The iconic Matterhorn mountain is illuminated by Swiss light artist Gerry Hofstetter aiming to send messages of hope, support and solidarity to the ones sufferings from the global coronavirus disease, COVID-19, pandemic in the alpine resort of Zermatt, Switzerland, Thursday, March 26, 2020. The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death. (Valentin Flauraud/Keystone via AP)



An Indian woman pleads in front of a policeman to let her pass a check point hoping to walk to their home with her family, a few hundred kilometers away, as the city comes under lock down in Ghaziabad, on the outskirts of New Delhi, India, Thursday, March 26, 2020. Some of India's legions of poor and people suddenly thrown out of work by a nationwide stay-at-home order began receiving aid distribution Thursday, as both the public and private sector work to blunt the impact of efforts to curb the coronavirus pandemic. Untold numbers of them are now out of work and many families have been left struggling to eat. (AP Photo/Altaf Qadri)



South African Defense Forces patrol downtown Johannesburg, South Africa, Friday, March 27, 2020. Police and army started patrolling moments after South Africa went into a nationwide lockdown for 21 days in an effort to mitigate the spread to the coronavirus. The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death.(AP Photo/Jerome Delay)



Kamini Doobay, an Emergency Medicine Resident physician at NYU Langone Medical Center and Bellevue Hospital, talks during an interview about her experiences treating COVID-19 patients, Thursday, March 26, 2020, in New York. As an emergency medicine physician in New York City, Dr. Doobay has always known that death is part of the territory in trying to care for the city's sickest. But it hasn't been like this—patients stricken with coronavirus, on ventilators, and no visitors allowed because of strict protocols to prevent its spread. (AP Photo/John Minchillo)



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In this image taken Thursday, March 26, 2020, French baker Ridha Khadher, who is providing baguettes and bread at the Elysee Palace and has launched an appeal to offer the breads to the Hospital medical staffs works at his bakery during the lockdown of the coronavirus in Paris. The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death. (AP Photo/Francois Mori)



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In this image taken Wednesday, March 25, 2020, French baker Ridha Khadher, who is providing baguettes and bread at the Elysee Palace and has launched an appeal to offer the breads to the Hospital medical staffs arrives at the Elysee Palace in Paris during the lockdown of the coronavirus. The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death. (AP Photo/Francois Mori)



Thierno, from Senegal, walks to work on an empty street as the lockdown to combat the spread of coronavirus continues in Badalona, Spain, Friday, March 27, 2020. The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death. (AP Photo/Felipe Dana)



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A man living in his car reacts to police and army patrolling downtown Johannesburg, South Africa, Friday, March 27, 2020. Police and army started patrolling moments after South Africa went into a nationwide lockdown for three weeks in an effort to mitigate the spread to the coronavirus. The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death.(AP Photo/Jerome Delay)

The economic damage of the pandemic was growing. Italy shut down most of its industry, and a record-shattering 3.3 million Americans applied for unemployment benefits last week—nearly five times the old record set in 1982. Companies in Europe are laying off workers at the fastest pace since 2009, according to surveys of business managers.

Despite that, Wall Street rallied for the third straight day after an unprecedented \$2.2 trillion economic rescue package to help businesses, hospitals and ordinary Americans passed the Senate. The rescue plan, which is expected to be voted on in the House later Friday, would dispense checks of \$1,200 per adult and \$500 per child.

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