

Italy hit by 368 new coronavirus deaths, hospitals in crisis

March 15 2020



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Italy on Sunday reported a one-day record death toll and leaders warned of a bed and artificial respirator shortage in the European epicentre of the coronavirus pandemic.

Official data showed the number of fatalities shooting up by 368 to 1,809—more than half of all the cases recorded outside China.

The Vatican took the drastic step of cancelling Easter week celebrations that were set to begin on April 5 as the country of 60 million braced for an extended crisis.

Only occasional joggers and a few locals carrying grocery bags could be seen on the streets of Rome on a sunny afternoon of Italy's first weekend under effective lockdown.

"I am not really interested in what people tell us about religion," pensioner Roman said after the Vatican announced that its Easter observances "will take place without the [physical presence](#) of the faithful".

"I'm interested in what people tell us about our health."

Milan's Lombardy region governor Attilio Fontana said the situation in areas around Italy's financial capital was "getting worse".

"We are close to the point where we will no longer be able to resuscitate people because we will be out of intensive care unit beds," Fontana told Italy's Sky TG24 channel.

"We need those machines (doctors) use to ventilate lungs, artificial respirators that unfortunately we cannot find," Fontana said.

"As soon as those respirators arrive from abroad, we will be ready to go on the attack."

The Lombardy region has recorded 1,218 of the deaths officially attributed to COVID-19 over the past three weeks—more than the rest

of Europe combined.

The region of 10 million—slightly smaller but more economically productive than neighbouring Switzerland to the north—also has 13,272 reported infections and 767 people in intensive care.

'No more ambulances'

Milan mayor Beppe Sala said he had managed to secure shipments of surgical masks from China to help cover a growing shortage.

"Milan has always had excellent relations with the main Chinese cities and I made a few phone calls over the past few days in search of masks," the Milan mayor said ai

"The first shipment arrived (Friday) and we will now distribute them to doctors, to our staff."

European Commission also announced the imminent delivery of one million masks from Germany.

Yet the situation remained critical despite Lombardy enjoying a world-class healthcare system that has been consistently praised by the World Health Organization for its level of equipment and organisation of staff.

Lombardy welfare councillor Giulio told reporters Saturday that "there are no more ambulances" in areas around Milan.

The governor of Venice's Veneto region to the east also called on "everyone to remain in isolation" to avoid putting hospitals under further strain.

"If you do not follow the rules, the health system will crash and I will

have to impose a curfew," Veneto governor Luca Zaia warned.

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte insisted on Sunday that his government was paying "maximum attention" to the situation in the north.

His government was set to unveil a new crisis plan that reportedly includes family relief measures such as parental leave pay and help for the self-employed.

The government said it was also in discussion with banks about a suspension of some family mortgage payments.

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