

Italy's slowing infections boost case for lockdowns

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Italy's coronavirus infections rate slowed for a fourth successive day Wednesday as fresh evidence emerged that long and painful lockdowns against pandemics will work.

The latest data from the epicentre of the once-in-a-century outbreak comes with more and more nations weighing whether to shutter their own stores and factories—and for how long.

Analysts at one of the big US investment banks said evidence from Italy this week could determine whether much of the United States "will diverge or follow the Italian trajectory".

Almost everything across the Mediterranean country has been closed for over two weeks.

Public gatherings have been banned and much of the economy is set to remain in a state of suspended animation for an indefinite time to come.

Analysts think Italy is sliding into its deepest recession in generations as a result.

But it is the price Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte has decided to pay to slow the spread of a disease that has now killed 7,503 in Italy and infected almost 75,000.

"History will judge us," the increasingly popular Italian leader told parliament on Wednesday.

"We must all contribute to the common good," Conte said. "The government has acted with the utmost determination and speed."

'Extremely positive'

Wednesday's figures showed deaths staying within the high but relative narrow range they had reached at the end of last week.

Health officials reported 683 new fatalities and 5,210 infections.

The overall rise in daily deaths among confirmed COVID-19 cases slowed to 10 percent.

It had been as high as 57 percent when the illness was still spreading exponentially on March 8.

The daily infections growth rate fell to a record low of 7.5 percent.

The World Health Organization's deputy director Ranieri Guerra sounded pleased.

"The slowdown in the (infections) [growth rate](#) is extremely positive," Guerra told Italy's Capitale radio.

"I think the measures taken (by Italy) are absolutely correct—perhaps with a certain delay at the start, but that is understandable."

The government-run National Research Council said 57 out of Italy's 107 provinces have already hit their peak of the virus spread.

The numbers are improving "and the containment measures are delivering the desired effect, even if we are in the initial phase of the slowdown," the research council said.

'Italian trajectory'

Italy's data are being watched by global policymaker as they weigh the potential health benefits of imposing national lockdowns against their damaging economic side effects.

"The next 3-5 days are key to seeing if Italy's lockdown measures are having an impact and if the US will diverge or follow the Italian trajectory," the Morgan Stanley investment bank wrote on Tuesday.

"We do note, however, that the number of mortalities has slowed from an exponential increase since the lock down began," the bank said.

There were still worrying signs in Italian regions such as Campania around Naples and Rome's Lazio.

Deaths in the Naples region rose from 49 on Monday to 74 on Wednesday.

Those in and around Rome went up from 63 to 95 over the same span.

And deaths in the northern Piemonte region around the industrial city of Turin rose from 315 on Monday to 449 on Wednesday.

The figures for all three regions represent jumps of around 50 percent in two days.

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