

Italy virus cases soar again; NY eyes temporary hospitals

March 21 2020, by Amy Forliti and Frank Jordans



A municipality worker wearing a face mask and protective suits disinfects chairs outside the the historical Sultan Ahmed Mosque, also known as Blue Mosque, amid the coronavirus outbreak, in Istanbul, Saturday, March 21, 2020. The new COVID-19 coronavirus can cause mild or moderate symptoms, but for some it can cause severe illness. (AP Photo/Emrah Gurel)

Italy's tally of coronavirus cases and deaths continues to soar, with officials on Saturday announcing new day-to-day highs: 793 dead and 6,557 cases.

The country, at the heart of western Europe's rampaging outbreak, now counts 53,578 known cases.

Across the Atlantic, New York state officials considered establishing temporary hospitals on college campuses and in New York City's main convention center in preparation for a possible onslaught of coronavirus patients, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Saturday.

Cuomo said the government is seeking to increase hospital bed capacity by 50 percent—up to 25,000 more beds. Officials have also identified 2 million protective masks to send to hot spots.

The state is reviewing four possible locations for temporary hospitals, which would be operated by the Army Corps of Engineers. The governor also said 1 million N-95 masks are being sent to New York City on Saturday, with another 500,000 masks going to Long Island. He is also trying to find a supplier for more gowns, and clothing companies are converting to make masks.

"Everything that can be done is being done," he said, adding, "We are literally scouring the globe looking for [medical supplies](#)."



Military armored vehicles patrol the streets during a quarantine in El Alto, Bolivia, Friday, March 20, 2020. Authorities have decreed a quarantine from 5pm to 5am in an attempt to stop the spread of the new coronavirus. The vast majority of people recover from the COVID-19 disease. (AP Photo/Juan Karita)

New York has seen about 10,400 coronavirus cases, and about 1,600 people hospitalized. Spread of the rapidly advancing virus has strained health care systems across the globe, and three American states with a combined population of 70 million are moving to restrict residents to their homes to prevent its spread. California started restricting residents Friday, and New York and Illinois were to follow this weekend. Connecticut and Oregon were preparing to do the same.

In Italy, more than 60 percent of the latest deaths occurred in the

northern region of Lombardy, whose hospitals have been reeling under a staggering case load that has left intensive care beds hard to find and respirators in short supply.

Officials said that on Sunday a team of 65 Cuban doctors and nurses, with experience in battling Ebola outbreaks, will arrive in northern Italy to help in the hard-hit Lombardy town of Cremona.



Luitpold Street in Bamberg, Germany, is seen shortly after the initial restriction imposed due to the spread of the coronavirus came into force, early Saturday, March 21, 2020. A curfew went into effect for Bavaria. Leaving one's own home is now only allowed if there are good reasons. (Nicolas Armer/dpa via AP)

Italian health officials realize they need to shorten the time between

emergence of symptoms and diagnosis, said Silvio Brusaferro, the head of the national Superior Health Institute. Currently that lag is about five days, he said.

The new increases come nearly two weeks into a national lockdown in a desperate bid to contain the contagion.

Almost a week into tight restrictions on free movement and the closure of most shops in Spain, police intensified their efforts to enforce confinement rules with fines and extra patrols to stop city-dwellers with second homes in the country from leaving town for the weekend.

Spain now has the third-highest number of infections worldwide. On Saturday it reported almost 5,000 new cases in the past day, bringing the total to nearly 25,000. The death toll rose to 1,326, up from 1,002 Friday.



A slushy street vendor, who uses a protective face mask when he has customers as a precaution against the spread of the new coronavirus, waits for them along the seawall, normally bustling with pedestrians, in Havana, Cuba, Friday, March 20, 2020. (AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa)

As hospitals and nursing homes buckle under the burden of the virus outbreak, Spanish health authorities have acknowledged that some intensive care units in the hardest-hit areas are close to their limit, and warned that they expect infections to continue to rise before measures to reverse the trend have an effect.

The army was building a field hospital with 5,500 beds in a convention center in Madrid, where hotels are also being turned into wards for virus patients without serious breathing problems.

Dr. Olga Meridiano, who treated victims of a 2004 jihadist bomb attack in Madrid that killed nearly 200 people and wounded many times more, said nothing prepared her for the national health tragedy that Spain is now enduring.

"I have been through many situations," she said from the central city of Guadalajara, where she works in a public hospital. "But nothing is like this."



Extremely light traffic moves along the 110 Harbor Freeway toward downtown mid afternoon, Friday, March 20, 2020, in Los Angeles. Traffic would normally be bumper-to-bumper during this time of day on a Friday. California Gov. Gavin Newsom is ordering the state's 40 million residents to stay at home indefinitely. His order restricts non-essential movements to control the spread of the coronavirus that threatens to overwhelm the state's medical system. He called up

500 National Guard troops Thursday to help with distributing food. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill)

"If we keep seeing daily increases of 23%, this cannot be withstood much longer," Meridiano said. "We are doubling up on our shifts. We have strategies to hang in there this week, but beyond that we need the situation to improve because we professionals are bearing a lot of pressure, including emotional."

In Germany's southern state of Bavaria, town squares were empty. Pigeons outnumbered people in London's usually bustling Trafalgar Square and Leicester Square a day after the British government ordered the closure of all bars, restaurants, movie theaters and other places where people congregate.

But shoppers still flocked to street markets in both countries, in a sign that restrictions were being interpreted in a patchwork fashion.

The number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 recorded in Africa rose above 1,000 Saturday, according to the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. At least 40 of Africa's 54 countries now have cases.



The Canadian border is pictured at the Peace Arch Canada-U.S. border crossing in Surrey, British Columbia, Friday, March 20, 2020. New restrictions in effect at midnight Friday along Canada's shared border with the United States because of the coronavirus focus more on blocking tourists and bargain-hunters than on clearing the way for so-called "essential" travel such as truckers hauling freight, health professionals and others who live on one side and work on the other. (Jonathan Hayward/The Canadian Press via AP)

Almost 287,000 cases have been confirmed globally, including more than 11,900 deaths, according to a running tally by Johns Hopkins University. Nearly 89,000 people have recovered.

For most people, the new virus 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. The vast majority recover.

Officials in many countries are desperate to prevent—or at least limit—a repeat of what has happened in China and southern Europe. The coronavirus outbreak overwhelmed medical services in the central Chinese city of Wuhan earlier this year and now is pushing them to the limit in Italy, Spain and France.

Italy's surging case numbers have frustrated health officials. Statements by authorities earlier on in the outbreak had raised hopes that new infections might soon start dropping off. But on Friday, officials reported further record increases, with 5,986 new cases and 627 new deaths. The country, which has Europe's largest outbreak, now has at least 47,021 cases and 4,032 dead.



Indian passengers wear face masks as a precaution against COVID-19 arrive at Secunderabad Railway Station in Hyderabad, India, Saturday, March 21, 2020. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (AP Photo/Mahesh Kumar A.)

Health Minister Roberto Speranza called for a "great alliance" between citizens and institutions, saying "what counts more is the behavior of every individual." Giuseppe Sala, mayor of Milan, capital of the hardest-stricken region of Lombardy, tried to rally the city's 1.4 million citizens, tweeting that "by now, we have understood, this is a marathon, not a sprint."

Germany's southwestern state of Baden-Wuerttemberg on Saturday offered to take in patients from the neighboring French region of Alsace that's struggling with a surge of infections overwhelming hospitals.

Britain still lags behind Italy, Spain and France in the spread of the virus, but the country's overstretched health system is creaking. The state-funded National Health Service has about 4,000 critical-care beds and some 5,000 ventilators, and officials say that's far fewer than will be needed as the number of cases spikes in the coming weeks. Britain, which has recorded 3,983 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 177 deaths, has already asked 65,000 retired nurses and doctors to return to work.



Policemen stand at the Pariser Platz in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin Saturday morning, March 21, 2020. The Senate announced further measures to stop the spread of the new coronavirus in Berlin. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (Paul Zinken/dpa via AP)

Workers near Moscow are rushing to build a clinic to treat hundreds of coronavirus patients as Russia prepares for a wave of infections. Placards in the style of Soviet propaganda posters have been erected near the site, with one showing Mayor Sergei Sobyenin pointing at the viewer and the slogan "Builders—Minutes count!"

China has been sending aid to several European countries, promoting its expertise and experience gained from fighting the outbreak at home. An

Air China flight carrying 18 tons of medical supplies including hundreds of thousands of surgical and protection masks landed in the Greek capital, Athens, Saturday morning.

As the pandemic has eased in Asia, China and other parts of the region are now trying to avoid importing cases from Europe, the U.S. and elsewhere.

China reported Saturday that its mainland had no new home-grown cases of the disease for the third straight day, but 41 imported ones in the previous 24-hour period.



Quarantine staff members wear face masks and shields as passengers arriving from Germany fill a form at Narita international airport in Narita, near Tokyo Saturday, March 21, 2020. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only

mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (Kyodo News via AP)

Restrictions on movement are being eased gradually in China as it tries to restart the economy without bringing back the disease. Officials in Wuhan are permitting supermarkets, convenience stores and some other retail businesses to reopen from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. if they are in areas with no confirmed or suspected cases.

In the U.S., the restrictions on movement take effect Saturday in Illinois and Sunday in New York. All workers in nonessential businesses will be required to stay home and gatherings of any size are banned in New York. Exceptions will be made for important errands, such as buying groceries and medicine, and for exercise.

The lockdowns in California and other states sent stock markets tumbling again. Wall Street had its worst week since the 2008 financial crisis, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average falling more than 900 points and down 17% for the week.



People wear face masks to protect against coronavirus infection as they shop at an IKEA store in Beijing, Saturday, March 21, 2020. Three major American states are locking down their residents in the face of a rapidly advancing virus storm that is already severely straining health systems in parts of Europe. The virus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough, for most people, but severe illness is more likely in the elderly and people with existing health problems. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)

A Navy sailor assigned to United States Central Command headquarters in Florida has tested positive for the novel coronavirus. Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf said more than 220,000 Americans have been screened at airports while returning to the United States from coronavirus affected countries.

Car maker BMW said it would shut down a huge manufacturing complex in South Carolina from April 3 to 19 and Nissan said it would suspend vehicle production at its two Mexican assembly plants from next Wednesday through April 14. Auto production has resumed in China, but only partially.

Turkey more than tripled the number of countries to which flights have been suspended to 68, as authorities banned picnics, barbecues and send-off gatherings for new soldiers.

Authorities in Cyprus turned away a boat carrying around 100 migrants, citing government directives banning the entry of foreign nationals to prevent the spread of the [coronavirus](#).



A woman and child wear face masks to protect against coronavirus infection as they shop at an IKEA store in Beijing, Saturday, March 21, 2020. Three major American states are locking down their residents in the face of a rapidly advancing virus storm that is already severely straining health systems in parts of Europe. The virus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough, for most people, but severe illness is more likely in the elderly and people with existing health problems. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)



People queue outside a large supermarket store, a day after the government unveiled an emergency package aimed at protecting workers' jobs and wages as they face hardship in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, in London, Saturday March 21, 2020. For some people the COVID-19 coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, but for some it causes severe illness. (Dominic Lipinski / PA via AP)



Leipziger Strasse is free of people and cars at Potsdamer Platz in Berlin at Saturday morning, March 21, 2020. The senate announces further measures to stop the spread of the corona virus in Berlin. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (Paul Zinken/dpa via AP)



Personnel of the Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport unload boxes with medical supplies, in Athens, Saturday, March 21, 2020. China has sent medical supplies to Greece, including hundreds of thousands of surgical and protection masks. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (AP Photo/Yorgos Karahalidis)



An Indian passenger wearing face mask and gloves as a precaution against COVID-19 opens glass window of a train compartment at Secunderabad Railway Station in Hyderabad, India, Saturday, March 21, 2020. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (AP Photo/Mahesh Kumar A.)



A graffiti depicting the character of Gollum from "Lord of the Rings," holding a roll of toilet paper and saying "My precious," is painted on a wall in the Mauerpark public park at the district Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin, Germany, Saturday, March 21, 2020. In order to slow down the spread of the coronavirus, the German government has considerably restricted public life and asked the citizens to stay at home. (AP Photo/Markus Schreiber)



Customers walk across the weekly market on Kollwitzplatz in Berlin, Germany, Saturday, March 21, 2020. In order to slow down the spread of the coronavirus, the German government has considerably restricted public life and asked the citizens to stay at home. (AP Photo/Markus Schreiber)



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Health workers screen people visiting a public hospital in Harare, Zimbabwe, Saturday, March 21, 2020, after Zimbabwe announced its first case of coronavirus, in one of Africa's most visited tourist spots. The pandemic now threatens a national health system that has nearly collapsed amid an economic crisis. For many people the new COVID-19 coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, but for some it can cause severe illness. (AP Photo/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi)

Colombian President Iván Duque announced Friday night that everyone would be required to isolate in their homes for three weeks starting Tuesday. Peru, Ecuador and Venezuela already are in lockdown.

Some small relief came to the Madrid's Severo Ochoa hospital on Saturday when an army emergency unit arrived to take 15 patients to a

huge field hospital the military set up in a convention center in the capital.

Otherwise, the hospital is working over capacity and receiving help from the local community: An educational center donated a load of masks and gloves. A group of football fan clubs brought hundreds of bottles of water.

For hospital spokesman Jorge Rivera, equally important is the support that normal citizens are showing the nation's health workers each evening at 8 p.m. when Spaniards open their windows and applaud, shout, flash lights, and sometimes blast music to show their appreciation for their efforts.

"For us, it is a boost of adrenaline, for our morale," Rivera said from work. "It says that we are all in this together, working to get through this emergency and recover our lives."

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