

# Italy mourns its virus dead at end of fateful month

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Italy marked a minute of silence and flew flags at half mast Tuesday to mourn the 11,591 people who have died from the coronavirus pandemic that has dramatically altered life in the Mediterranean country.

The nation of 60 million people has recorded nearly a third of all fatalities caused by COVID-19 across the world.

The day of mourning marks a month in which Italy saw more deaths from a single disaster than at any time since World War II.

It was first detected in Italy near the northern financial hub Milan in late February before spreading and overwhelming hospitals with critically ill patients.

Italy now has nearly 4,000 people receiving [intensive care treatment](#) for COVID-19.

The virus "is an injury that hurt the whole country," Rome mayor Virginia Raggi said after a priest read a prayer for the dead and the nation observed a minute's silence.

"Together, we will get through this," she said at a ceremony held outside Rome's city hall.

Vatican City also flew its yellow-and-white flags at half mast in solidarity.

## **When do we restart?**

The Italian government imposed an unprecedented lockdown three weeks ago to help stem the spread of a virus that has now officially infected more than 100,000 people in the country.

The financial cost of the forced shutdown of almost all businesses threatens to send Italy's economy—the European Union's third largest last year—into its deepest recession in decades.

On Monday the government decided to extend the shutdown until at least mid-April.

Stores and restaurants are not expected to start opening until at least May and no official is willing to predict when life might return to the way it was just a month ago.

Italy's Confindustria big business lobby said it expected the country's total output to shrink by six percent if the pandemic does not ease by the end of May.

It said each additional week after that would chop another 0.75 percent off Italy's gross domestic product.

Big businesses around the northern city of Bergamo where the death rates are some of the highest in the world sound anxious about their long-term prospects.

"Saying 'close everything' may be right, but it is not sustainable forever," the lobby's Bergamo branch president Stefano Scaglia told the *Il Fatto Quotidiano* newspaper.

"The real, complicated thing to do—and one no one seems to be doing—is to try to understand how we can restart things again."

Rome's mayor stressed Tuesday that it was imperative for everyone "to stay at home to save us all".

"We must do it for all those who lost their lives and all those who put their lives at risk by working for us all," Raggi said.

But the head of the infectious diseases department at Milan's Luigi Sacco Hospital that managed to isolate the Italian strain said he was looking at the future with some hope.

"We have the impression that (the pandemic) is weakening," Massimo

Galli told Italian radio.

Italy reported 812 deaths on Monday. Its single day record was 969 on Friday—the highest daily toll recorded anywhere in the world.

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