

In Italy and beyond, virus outbreak reshapes work and play

March 4 2020, by Nicole Winfield and Lori Hinnant



A worker wearing a face mask sprays disinfectant as a precaution against the new coronavirus at a subway station in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man)

Italy closed all schools and universities and barred fans from all sporting

events for the next few weeks, as governments trying to curb the spread of the coronavirus around the world resorted to increasingly sweeping measures that transformed the way people work, shop, pray and amuse themselves.

With the virus present in more than 80 countries, Saudi Arabia barred citizens from making the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, Iran canceled Friday prayers for a second week, and leader after leader pleaded with citizens to put an end to that traditional symbol of mutual trust, the handshake.

The Italian government decreed that soccer games and other sporting events will take place without spectators until at least April 3. Italy is the epicenter of Europe's coronavirus outbreak. More than 3,000 have been infected and at least 107 have died, the most of any country outside China, where the illness began.

Italy also closed schools for 8.4 million students through March 15, after at least four other countries—Japan, the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon and Iraq—took similar action.

"I know it's a decision with an impact. As education minister, I obviously want my students back in school as soon as possible," said Education Minister Lucia Azzolina.

Italy, Iran and South Korea confronted fast-growing clusters of the disease that accounted for about 80% of new cases outside China, according to the World Health Organization. In all, more than 95,000 people have contracted the virus worldwide, with more than 3,200 deaths.



People sit a recommended distance apart from each other during the presentation of the new FIAT 500 electric in Milan, Italy, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. Countries are taking drastic and increasingly visible measures to curb the new coronavirus that first emerged in China and was spreading quickly through Europe, the Mideast and the Americas. (AP Photo/Antonio Calanni)

In the United States, the death toll reached 11.

Iran reported 92 deaths among its more than 2,900 cases, though many fear the outbreak is far bigger. Among the ill are dozens of members of the government. The Islamic republic canceled Friday prayers to avoid public gatherings.

"The virus has no wings to fly," said Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour. "We are the ones who transfer it to each other."

WHO said about 3.4% of people infected with the COVID-19 virus globally have died, making it more lethal than the common flu. But that figure was met with skepticism, with scientists noting that large numbers of mild cases have probably gone undetected or unreported. A study last week in the New England Journal of Medicine of data from more than 30 Chinese provinces estimated the death rate at 1.4%.



South Korean army soldiers wearing protective gears move to spray disinfectant as a precaution against the new coronavirus in Gyeonggi, South Korea, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. (Kim Hyun-tae/Yonhap via AP)

In Daegu, the South Korean city at the center of that country's outbreak, a shortage of hospital space meant about 2,300 patients were being cared

for in other facilities while they awaited a hospital bed. Prime Minister Chung Se-Kyun sought to assure people in the southeastern city, saying, "We will win the war against COVID-19."

South Korea reported 145 new infections Thursday, raising its total to 5,766, second-highest in the world.

In Europe, officials told French soccer players to simply disperse—without shaking hands—after lining up, and referees and coaches will no longer shake hands either. In Paris, the Louvre finally reopened after closing because of fears among workers about catching the virus from visitors, but it will no longer accept cash, because of the danger of germs.

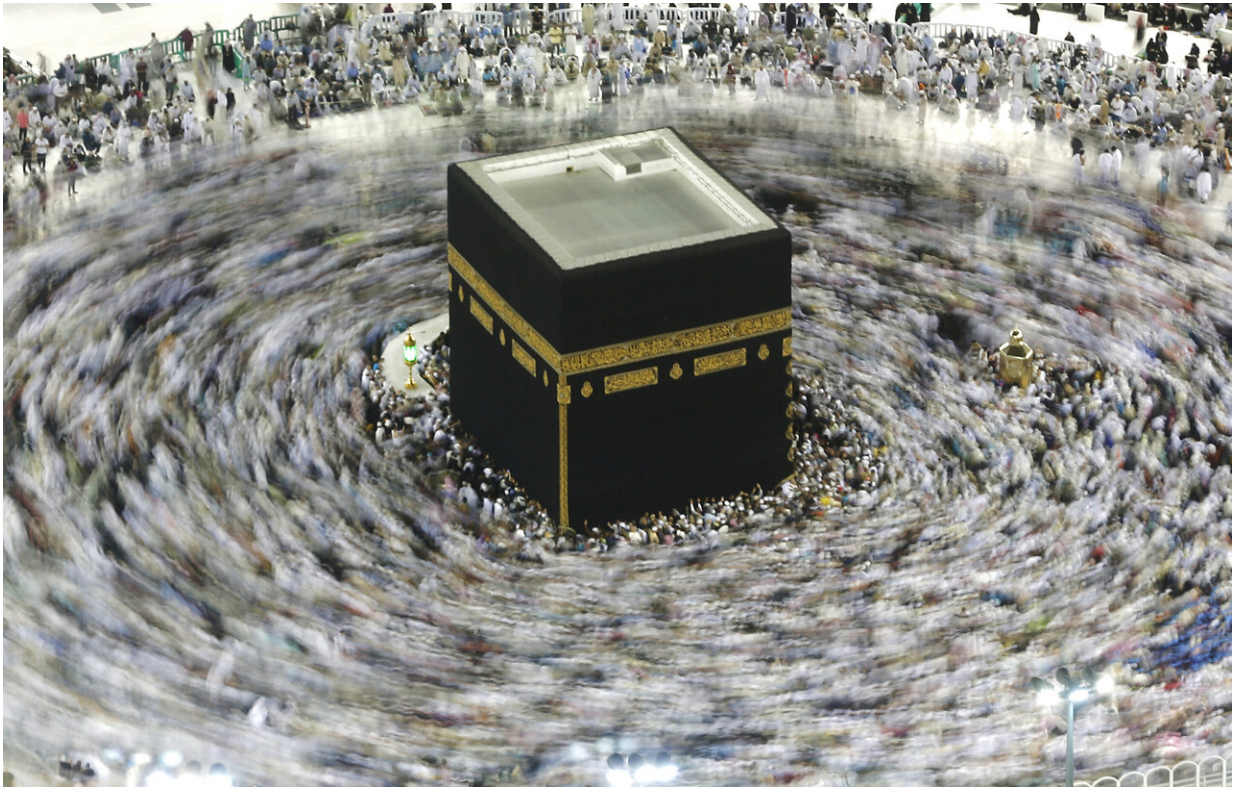
A news conference at Milan's Triennale contemporary art and design museum looked like an exhibit itself, with journalists' chairs spaced more than a yard (meter) apart.



Health officials check tourists' temperatures in hopes of containing the spread of the COVID-19 virus as they arrive at Suvarnabhumi Airport Bangkok, Thailand, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)



Ethiopian Airline cabin crew wait to be screened by Nigerian port health officials for COVID-19 virus, upon arrival at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport in Lagos, Nigeria, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. (AP Photo/Sunday Alamba)



In this picture taken with a slow shutter speed, far smaller crowds than usual of Muslim pilgrims circumambulate the Kaaba, the cubic building at the Grand Mosque, in the Muslim holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. The coronavirus outbreak disrupted Islamic worship in the Middle East as Saudi Arabia on Wednesday banned its citizens and other residents of the kingdom from performing the pilgrimage in Mecca, while Iran canceled Friday prayers in major cities. (AP Photo/Amr Nabil)



Medical staff wearing protective suits check documents as they wait for people with suspected symptoms of the new coronavirus, at a testing facility in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. The coronavirus epidemic shifted increasingly westward toward the Middle East, Europe and the United States on Tuesday, with governments taking emergency steps to ease shortages of masks and other supplies for front-line doctors and nurses. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)



Tourists wearing protective gear against the Covid-19 virus arrive at the Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok, Thailand, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)



Pamela Coke-Hamilton, Director of the Division on International Trade and Commodities at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, UNCTAD, presents an UNCTAD's analysis on the impacts of new coronavirus COVID-19 on global value chains during a press conference at the European headquarters of the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. (Salvatore Di Nolfi/Keystone via AP)



Worker produce hand sanitizer at the Companhia Nacional do Álcool (CNA) factory in Piracicaba, Brazil, Tuesday, March 3, 2020. Last week the factory added a second shift of workers to produce more hand sanitizer, and while the CNA was never an exporter, it's considering that by adding a third shift. One week ago, Brazil confirmed Latin America's first case of the new coronavirus. (AP Photo/Andre Penner)



Indian students wear masks and attend a class at a government school in Hyderabad, India, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. A new virus first detected in China has infected more than 90,000 people globally and caused over 3,100 deaths. The World Health Organization has named the illness COVID-19, referring to its origin late last year and the coronavirus that causes it. (AP Photo/Mahesh Kumar A.)



Workers wearing protective gears spray disinfectant inside an airplane for New York as a precaution against the new coronavirus at Incheon International Airport in Incheon, South Korea, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. The coronavirus epidemic shifted increasingly westward toward the Middle East, Europe and the United States on Tuesday, with governments taking emergency steps to ease shortages of masks and other supplies for front-line doctors and nurses. (Suh Myoung-geon/Yonhap via AP)



Army soldiers wearing protective suits spray disinfectant as a precaution against the new coronavirus at a shopping street in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. The coronavirus epidemic shifted increasingly westward toward the Middle East, Europe and the United States on Tuesday, with governments taking emergency steps to ease shortages of masks and other supplies for front-line doctors and nurses. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)



People wearing masks walk past the Olympic rings near the New National Stadium in Tokyo, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. The Tokyo Olympics are being threatened by a fast-spreading virus that has shut down most schools, sports competitions and Olympic-related events in Japan. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



Electoral officials count ballots cast by Israelis under home quarantine after returning from Coronavirus infected zones in the city of Shoham, Israel, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. (AP Photo/Tsafir Abayov)



Three commuters, center, wear masks as they walk through the World Trade Center transportation hub, Wednesday, March 4, 2020, in New York. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)



A woman wearing a mask lights a candle at the St. Louis of the French church in Rome, Wednesday, March 4, 2020 as the church, which has three of the painter's most celebrate works, reopened to the public after a temporary closure. A priest at the church had tested positive for the virus after he had driven to Paris. The church was due to open Wednesday after health experts decided visitors ran no risk of infection. (AP Photo/Domenico Stinellis)

In Israel, the country's chief rabbi urged observant Jews to refrain from kissing the mezuzah, the small box containing a prayer scroll that is posted by Jews on their doorposts. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also urged people to adopt the Indian greeting of "namaste," with hands together, rather than a handshake.

Businesses of all types suffered a downturn as travel and tourism

plummeted and worried consumers changed their habits.

"People are afraid to touch anything or take anything from us," said Maedeh Jahangiri, a perfume seller at a mall in Tehran.

China reported 139 new cases Thursday and 31 deaths, raising its totals to 80,409 cases and 3,012 deaths. The number of cases was higher than Wednesday's figure, but new deaths were lower, as the illness continues to decline in the country. While hardest-hit Hubei province had most of the new cases and deaths, hospitals there released another 1,923 patients who were declared cured.

Doctors working in Wuhan, Hubei's capital where the illness emerged in December, said hospitals there have an increasing number of empty beds but cautioned a new spike of infections was always possible. "The war is not over," said Dr. Cao Bin, who specializes in respiratory research.

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