

Nations employ drastic tactics to fight microscopic foe

March 13 2020, by Aritz Parra and Lori Hinnant



A health official sprays disinfectant in the wake of the new coronavirus outbreak ahead of the Friday prayer at a mosque in Jakarta, Indonesia, Friday, March 13, 2020. The vast majority of people recover from the new virus. According to the World Health Organization, people with mild illness recover in about two weeks, while those with more severe illness may take three to six weeks to recover. (AP Photo/Dita Alangkara)

Tens of millions of students stayed home on three continents, security forces went on standby to guard against large gatherings of people, and bars, restaurants and offices closed Friday to slow the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

The virus edged ever closer to the world's power centers, with positive tests for the Canadian prime minister's wife, a top aide to Iran's supreme leader, a Brazilian official who met with President Donald Trump, and an Australian Cabinet minister who met with U.S. Attorney General William Barr and Trump's daughter, Ivanka.

Channeling wartime rhetoric and tactics in the face of a microscopic enemy, leaders appealed for solidarity to battle a threat that appeared to expand exponentially. They vowed to protect not just the sick, but those sacrificing their livelihoods and education for the greater good.

With promises of financial support from the European Commission, France and Germany, stocks surged on Wall Street and in Europe a day after the market's worst session in over three decades.

With new infections rising sharply in Spain, the government put 60,000 people in four towns on a mandatory lockdown Friday—the nation's first and Europe's second after drastic nationwide measures in Italy. In Madrid, which is struggling with nearly 2,000 infections, many in nursing homes, the government was pooling intensive care units and considering offers by hotel chains to transform rooms into sick wards.



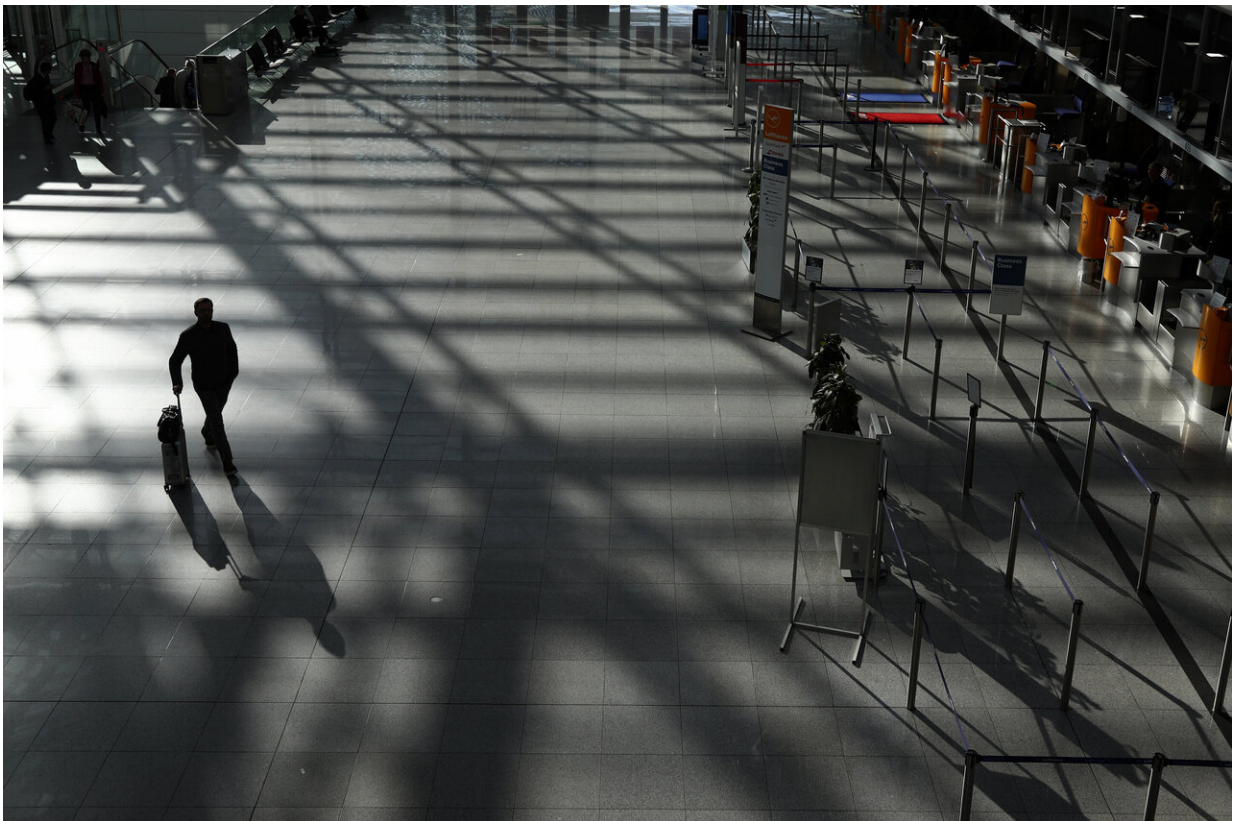
People take a selfie outside the Sagrada Familia basilica in Barcelona, Spain, Friday, March 13, 2020. The basilica closed its doors to visitors and suspend construction from Friday March 13 to prevent the spread of the new COVID-19 coronavirus. Spain, along with Italy and France, is among the countries worst hit by the virus so far in Europe. (AP Photo/Joan Mateu)

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez announced a two-week state of emergency beginning Saturday and pledged to "mobilize all resources," including military, to contain the country's sharp rise in coronavirus cases.

"It's an emergency that affects the life and health of all. The government is going to protect all citizens," Sánchez said.

In China, where new infections have tailed off, authorities mobilized to prevent a boomerang effect, quarantining new arrivals for 14 days. But the intensifying spread of COVID-19 beyond Asia dashed any hopes for containing the virus, despite drastic curbs on travel and social events.

In Europe and the United States, leaders and [medical experts](#) tried to predict the future—or at least the next few weeks—by scrutinizing the virus' trajectory so far, especially in China and Italy, the epicenters of Asia and Europe. Congress and the Trump administration closed in on a sweeping aid package with sick pay, free testing and other resources to help reassure anxious Americans.



A man walks through the empty hall of Terminal II at the airport in Munich, Germany, Friday, March 13, 2020. Due to the Coronavirus a large number of flights have to be cancelled. For most people, the new coronavirus 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. (AP Photo/Matthias Schrader)

The Italian town of Codogno, which had all but shut down hours after recording Italy's first locally spread [coronavirus](#) infection, showed that changing habits does make a difference. New infections have slowed drastically there compared to the rest of Italy, where draconian measures came far later.

"More than a sigh of relief, there was some concern over the risk that all of the sacrifices were in vain," said Mayor Francesco Passerini, who like most in the town wears a mask.

The goal of all authorities is to slow the spread of the virus to avoid overwhelming hospitals with those sickened by an illness that no one in the world has immunity to. Worldwide, 137,000 people have been infected and more than 5,000 have died but half of those who had the virus have already recovered. Most patients have only mild or moderate symptoms such as a fever or cold, but severe symptoms including pneumonia can occur, especially in the elderly and people with existing health problems.



Brazilian tourists wear a mask as they visit the Mucem Museum in Marseille, southern France, Friday, March 13, 2020. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (AP Photo/

While Washington scrambled to shape an economic rescue package, European officials pushed back against Trump's sharp restrictions on travel from Europe.

"Instead of tending to the problems of his country, and to a virus that knows no borders, he thinks that he can fight it like people that have a different citizenship than American," said German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz, who is also Germany's vice chancellor.

"But this is a virus, if I may say so, and it actually shows that solidarity is the only way that we can move forward as human beings," he said.

Exchange student Orsan Emge was trying to catch her flight home to San Diego from Madrid.

"It hasn't been canceled yet, but it's heading in that direction," she said.

"I want to get back to the United States before I have to be put in quarantine."



A worker wearing a protective suit disinfects the city hall in Marikina, east of Manila, Philippines on Friday, March 13, 2020. The Philippine president announced Thursday domestic travel to and from metropolitan Manila will be suspended for a month and authorized sweeping quarantines in the crowded capital to fight the new coronavirus. For most people, the new coronavirus

causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness.(AP Photo/Aaron Favila)

The exponential spread of the virus in Europe, North America and the Middle East has drawn contrasts with waning outbreaks in the hardest-hit nations in Asia. China, where the virus emerged late last year, still accounts for more than 60% of global infections but on Friday reported just eight new cases and seven deaths.

The size of permitted gatherings dwindled sharply in country after country, state after state. French President Emmanuel Macron, who announced the indefinite closure of all schools late Thursday, praised the French for taking action.

"That is what makes a great nation: Women and men able to put the collective interest above all, a human community held together by values: Solidarity and fraternity," he said.

Chinese President Xi Jinping told the U.N. leader his nation was returning to normal and now wants to conduct joint research on drugs and vaccines and offer "as much assistance as it can" to countries in need. A Chinese medical crew arrived in Italy and surplus supplies were sent to Iran.



Mist is seen on the goggles of a worker wearing a protective suit as he disinfects the city hall of Marikina, in Manila, Philippines on Friday, March 13, 2020. The Philippine president announced Thursday domestic travel to and from metropolitan Manila will be suspended for a month and authorized sweeping quarantines in the crowded capital to fight the new coronavirus. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness.(AP Photo/Aaron Favila)

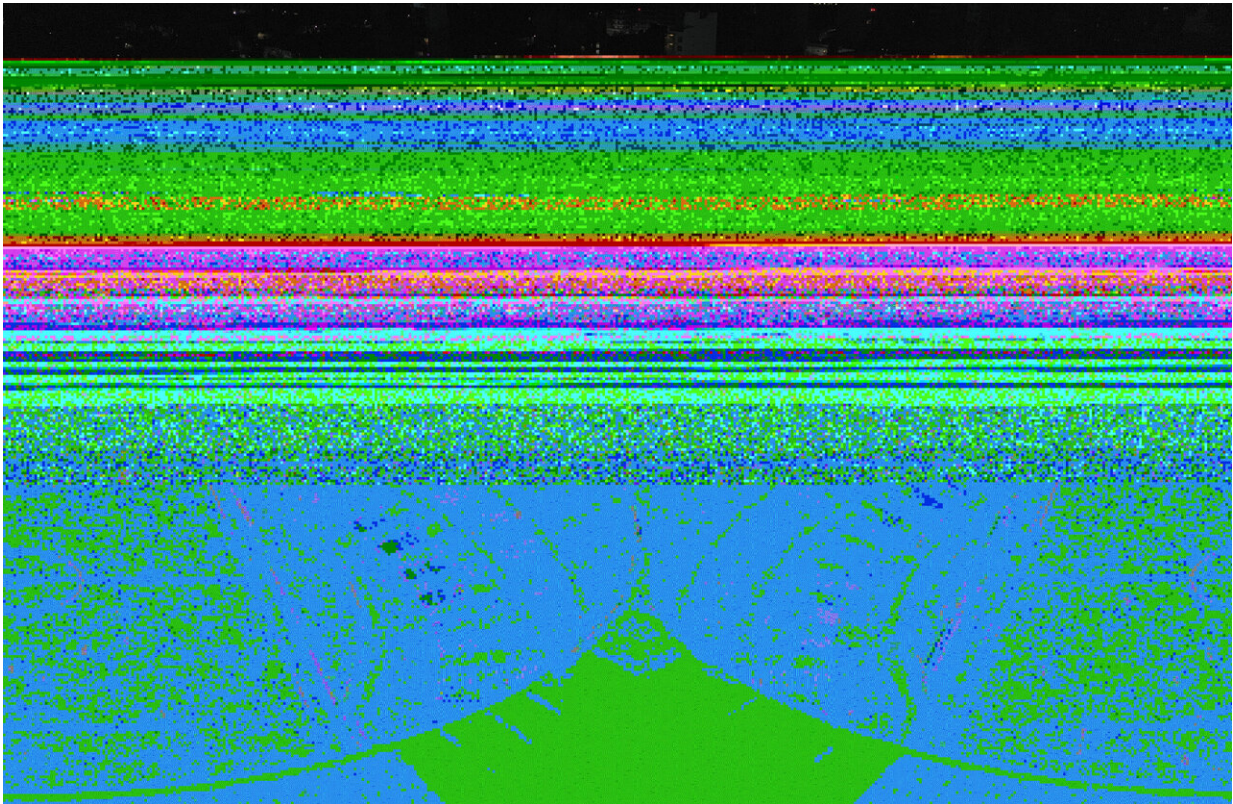
In South Korea, which had nearly 8,000 cases overall, Friday marked the first day recoveries outnumbered new infections since the country's first patient was confirmed Jan. 20.

The pandemic's new epicenter is Europe. Italy's death toll topped 1,000 with more than 15,000 confirmed cases. France, Spain and Germany all

exceeded 2,000 cases each. Panic buying was seen around the continent.

In Italy's hardest-hit Lombardy region, hospitals were overflowing with both the sick and the dead. The country's restaurants, cafes and retail shops closed. Grocery stores, pharmacies and markets were allowed to operate, with orderly lines of evenly spaced customers forming outside to avoid crowds inside.

The U.S. Defense Department closed all schools on continental European military facilities, affecting tens of thousands of students.



A man walks past a large display promoting the Tokyo 2020 Olympics in Tokyo, Friday, March 13, 2020. U.S. President Donald Trump's suggestion to postpone the Tokyo Olympics for a year because of the spreading coronavirus was immediately shot down by Japan's Olympic minister. For most people, the new

coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)

In Iran, which exceeds 10,000 cases and 400 deaths, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif urged the Trump administration to immediately lift sanctions over the country's nuclear program. He said they made it difficult to import medicine and medical equipment.

State-run TV reported a positive test and home quarantine for Ali Akbar Velayati, a trusted adviser to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the 80-year-old leader of the Islamic Republic. Iran's senior vice president, Cabinet ministers, members of parliament, Revolutionary Guard members and Health Ministry officials are also infected.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was isolating himself after his wife tested positive. The Australian home affairs minister was hospitalized in isolation after testing positive. He returned home on Sunday from Washington, D.C., where he met with U.S. Attorney-General William Barr, Trump's daughter, Ivanka and Sen. Lindsey Graham, who has self-quarantined.



A health official sprays disinfectant in the wake of the new coronavirus outbreak ahead of the Friday prayer at a mosque in Jakarta, Indonesia, Friday, March 13, 2020. The vast majority of people recover from the new virus. According to the World Health Organization, people with mild illness recover in about two weeks, while those with more severe illness may take three to six weeks to recover. (AP Photo/Dita Alangkara)



A man walks by the Colosseum in Rome Friday, March 13, 2020. A sweeping lockdown is in place in Italy to try to slow down the spread of coronavirus epidemic. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some, it can cause more severe illness, especially in older adults and people with existing health problems. (Cecilia Fabiano/LaPresse via AP)



Empty supermarket shelves in London, as people stock up due to the coronavirus, Friday, March 13, 2020. For most people, the new coronavirus 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. (AP Photo/Kirsty Wigglesworth)



Peru's Alianza Lima and Argentina's Racing Club play a Copa Libertadores soccer match at the Presidente Peron stadium in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Thursday, March 12, 2020. The match was played in an empty, closed door stadium as part of the government's measures to contain transmission of the new coronavirus. For most people the new coronavirus 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. (AP Photo/Gustavo Garello)



A worker disinfects the railings as a precaution against COVID-19 at a metro station in New Delhi, India, Friday, March 13, 2020. The vast majority of people recover from the new coronavirus. According to the World Health Organization, people with mild illness recover in about two weeks, while those with more severe illness may take three to six weeks to recover. (AP Photo/Altaf Qadri)



People wearing face masks walk at a street in Hong Kong Friday, March. 13, 2020. For most, the coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. But for a few, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illnesses, including pneumonia. (AP Photo/Vincent Yu)



A woman looks at an empty bread aisle at a supermarket in Antwerp, Belgium, Friday, March 13, 2020. Belgium announced sweeping measures on Thursday, including the closure of all schools, restaurants and bars as well as cancelling sporting and cultural events, in an effort to curb the spread of the virus. For most people, the new coronavirus 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. (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo)

Despite meeting at Mar-a-Lago with a top Brazilian official who tested positive, Trump has no immediate plans to be tested or to self-quarantine, the White House said. Trump did, however, halt his trademark political rallies, following the lead of Democratic rivals Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders.

Across the U.S., where cases have topped 1,700, a sense of urgency was pervasive. Professional athletes and entertainers were among those infected.

Schools emptied of students and workplace cubicles went vacant. Crowded gatherings were restricted from New York to California. Disneyland and Disney World were to close in coming days. And [sports fans](#) could not even cheer their favorite teams from the safety of their living rooms since professional basketball, baseball, hockey, soccer and other leagues canceled and postponed games.

Yet decisions still loomed for the biggest athletic competition of them all—the 2020 Summer Olympics—which was still firmly on the calendar. The International Olympic Committee and the Tokyo organizing committee were not considering canceling or delaying the games, "absolutely not at all," said Japan Olympics minister Seiko Hashimoto.

© 2020 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: Nations employ drastic tactics to fight microscopic foe (2020, March 13) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-03-nations-drastic-tactics-microscopic-foe.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--