

# Virus deaths pass 10,000 as California shuts down

March 20 2020, by Joseph Boyle With Andrew Marszal In Los Angeles and Hazel Ward In Madrid

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China reported on Friday a second day with no new domestic cases of the virus since it appeared in the central city of Wuhan in December

More than 10,000 people have now died in a coronavirus pandemic that

has swept from China throughout the world, forcing the confinement of tens of millions in their homes.

As the virus has marched westwards, the severity of the outbreaks and the focus of concern has shifted from Asia to Europe, with increasingly tough restrictions being imposed by national governments.

The US state of California, among the worst hit in the country, has told its 40 million residents to stay at home, the most drastic move yet in the United States to combat the pandemic.

However, the California measures will not be enforced by police unlike in France, Italy, Spain and other European countries where people face fines if they break the rules.

Germany's biggest state Bavaria on Friday became the first region in the country to order a lockdown for two weeks, imposing "fundamental restrictions" on going out.

The strict measures follow the template set by China, where a lockdown imposed in Hubei province where the new coronavirus first emerged appears to have paid off.

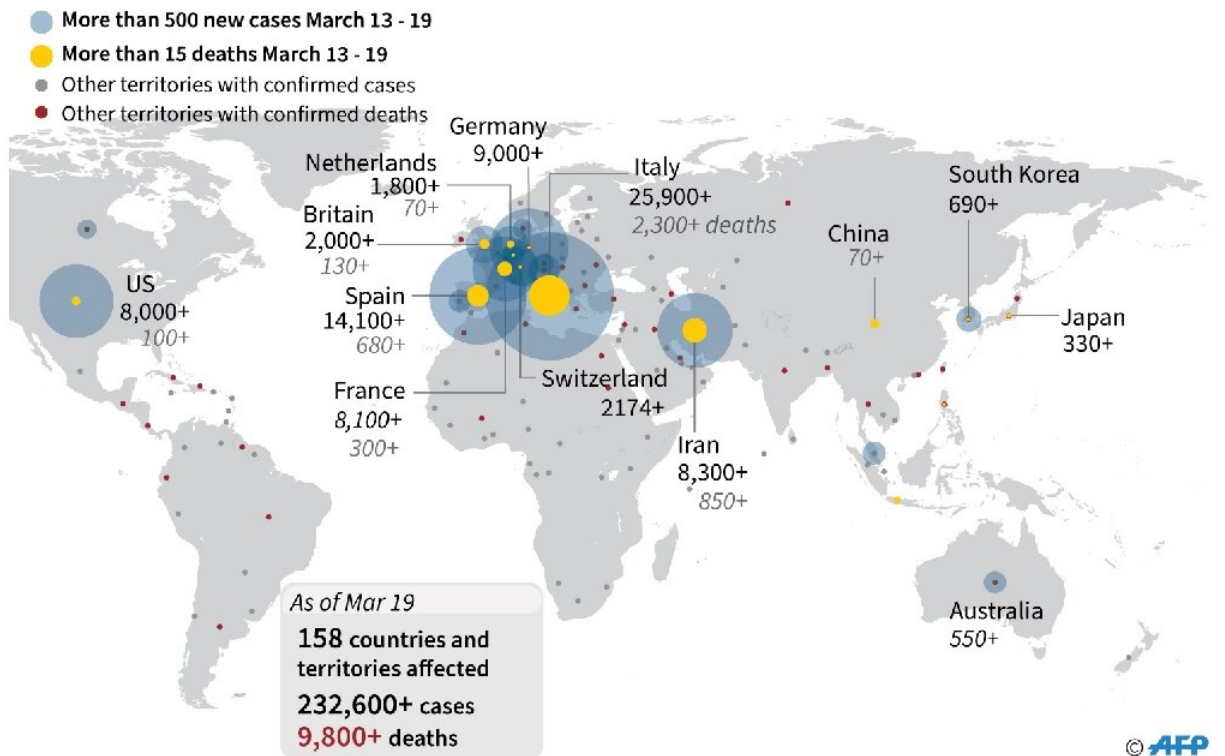
The country is now reporting on a handful of new infections each day, apparently from overseas visitors.

Italy is battling the single most deadly outbreak on the planet with 3,405 deaths, followed by 3,248 in China and Iran with 1,433, according to an AFP tally of official data.

Europe now accounts for half of the 10,000 fatalities linked to the COVID-19 disease around the world.

However, accurate figures are difficult to come by as many of those who die are suffering from other illnesses and infection rates are uncertain because of a lack of testing in many countries.

### One week of new COVID-19 cases



Graphic showing largest number of daily cases of COVID-19 from March 13 to 19

### Scramble for treatments

The United States is showing signs that it is ramping up its efforts on all fronts, fast-tracking [antimalarial drugs](#) for use as a treatment against the virus and promising a \$1 trillion emergency relief package to combat the

economic turmoil.

The package—coupled with a European Central Bank plan to buy 750 billion euros in bonds—saw stock markets rebound on Friday with exchanges up throughout Asia and Europe.

US President Donald Trump, who has come under fire for his response to the crisis, said on Thursday that US officials would make antimalarials chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine available "almost immediately".

Experts are divided over whether the drugs are suitable though, having undergone only the briefest of clinical trials.

German and American drug firms are frantically trying to synthesise treatments for the disease and Chinese scientists are also carrying out clinical trials, though no studies have yet been published.

Trump also sparked an international row after he accused the Chinese of being secretive over its initial spread and severity, saying the world is now "paying a big price".

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang hit back, saying "some people" were trying to "stigmatise" China's fight against the virus.

"This approach ignores the great sacrifice made by the Chinese people to safeguard the health and safety of humankind, and slanders China's major contribution to global public health," he said.

## **European lockdown bites**

Across Europe, governments continued to rigorously enforce lockdown measures.



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France announced more than 4,000 people were fined on the first day of its confinement and ministers branded those breaking the rules as "idiots".

France and Italy have both said they will most likely extend the confinement beyond the initial periods, while British schools will close indefinitely on Friday.

As Europeans battle to cope with the isolation, technology companies have begun to hint at the strain being put on their systems.

Both Netflix and YouTube, which both say they have experienced a surge in demand since lockdowns began, have promised to reduce the default image quality of streaming video in Europe to ease pressure on the internet.

The restrictions are also ironically bringing communities together in some places.

In sparsely populated rural Spain—a country that ranks fourth in the world for [coronavirus](#) infections—neighbours are pulling together to help the old and the vulnerable.

Sergio Caminero, 30, who lives in Lovingos, a hamlet of just 50 people north of Madrid, went to pick up some shopping for an elderly neighbour.

"She's older and is quite frightened and tense," he told AFP.

The strain on public health and education systems as well as the economy is likely to deepen in the coming weeks.

The shadow of the virus is lengthening across Africa, which is no stranger to deadly outbreaks, but it has reported little more than 700 out of the nearly quarter million cases worldwide.

The global sporting calendar, shredded by the spread of the pandemic, still has one major event coming up that has not yet been called off—the Olympic Games, set to take place in Japan in the summer.

Japan Olympic Committee member Kaori Yamaguchi broke ranks with the official line, telling the Nikkei daily: "It should be postponed under the current situation where athletes are not well prepared."

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