

Virus restrictions tighten, disrupting daily life, worship

March 15 2020, by Joseph Wilson and Geir Moulson



Polish policemen talk to drivers at the closed border crossing near Hradek nad Nisou, Czech Republic, Sunday, March 15, 2020. Due to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, Poland has imposed more restrictions at their borders. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (AP Photo/Petr David Josek)

New travel restrictions and border closures reverberated Sunday across Europe and beyond as daily life increasingly ground to a halt to try to keep people apart and slow the spread of the coronavirus. Americans returning home faced chaos at airports as overwhelmed border agents tried to screen arriving passengers.

Public worship was curtailed as Muslim authorities announced that the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem's Old City would be closed indefinitely, and the Vatican said next month's Holy Week services would not be open to the public.

The number of new coronavirus cases surged in hard-hit Italy to nearly 25,000 and it recorded 368 more deaths to bring its overall toll to 1,809. With the country under a nearly week-old lockdown, Pope Frances ventured out of the Vatican to visit two churches in Rome to pray for the sick, a spokesman said.

Spain awoke to the first day of a nationwide quarantine. In the Philippines, soldiers and police sealed off the densely populated capital of Manila from most domestic travelers. Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz announced plans to limit movement nationwide following Italy and Spain in barring people from leaving their homes except for essential errands or work.

With new infections dwindling in Asia, Europe has become the main front line of the fight against COVID-19. The virus has infected 156,000 people and killed over 5,800, but nearly 74,000 people have already recovered from it.



In this photo provided by Austin Boschen, people wait in line to go through the customs at Dallas Fort Worth International Airport in Grapevine, Texas, Saturday, March 14, 2020. International travelers reported long lines at the customs at the airport Saturday as staff took extra precautions to guard against the new coronavirus, The Dallas Morning News reports. Boschen said it took him at least 4 hours to go through the customs. (Austin Boschen via AP)

China, Italy, Iran, South Korea and Spain have the most infections. For most people, the 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.

People should go out "only alone or with the people who live in their apartment," said Austria's Kurz, whose country has 800 infections.

Those comments were echoed by one of America's top infectious disease experts.

"I think Americans should be prepared that they are going to have to hunker down significantly more than we as a country are doing," Dr. Anthony Fauci of the National Institutes of Health told NBC's "Meet the Press."

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy said he's considering a statewide curfew to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus, and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said a lockdown in the nation's largest city couldn't be ruled out. "Every option is on the table in a crisis," the Democrat said on CNN.



Pope Francis celebrates Mass at his Santa Marta residence, at the Vatican, Sunday, March 15, 2020. Masses for the faithful have been suspended following Italy's Coronavirus emergency. 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. (Vatican News via AP)

Travelers returning to the U.S. after the Trump administration imposed a wide-ranging ban on people entering from Europe faced hours-long waits for required medical screenings. Videos and photos on social media showed packed arrival halls and winding lines.

The crowds prompted Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker to tweet angrily at President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence, demanding

that they take action to address the crowds.

"This is unacceptable, counterproductive and exactly the opposite of what we need to do to prevent #COVID19," Illinois Sen. Tammy Duckworth tweeted.

The U.S. has seen 61 deaths and more than 2,900 infections. In hard-hit Washington state, officials said the disease is straining the supply of protective gear available to medical providers.

Italy, the worst-hit European country, reported its biggest day-to-day increase in infections—3,590 more cases in a 24-hour period—for a total of almost 24,747.



A woman wears a mask and gloves as she prepares postal votes in Munich, Germany, Sunday, March 15, 2020. Germany has been slower than some of its neighbours to ban large gatherings, initially leaving the decision to local authorities as required by country's federal structure. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. (AP Photo/Matthias Schrader)

"It's not a wave. It's a tsunami," said Dr. Roberto Rona, in charge of intensive care at the Monza hospital.

The transport ministry banned passengers from taking ferries to the island of Sardinia and halted overnight train trips, which many in the north had used to reach homes and families in the south. Hospitals were overwhelmed with the sick.

Even as authorities pleaded for people to stay home, Pope Francis visited St. Mary Major Basilica, near Rome's central train station, to pray for the sick, said Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni.

The pontiff then walked to another church which has a crucifix that in 1522 was carried in a procession during a plague afflicting Rome. In his prayer, Francis has "invoked the end of the pandemia that has stricken Italy and the world, implored healing for the many sick, recalled the many victims of these days," and asked for consolation for their family and friends.



An avenue is seen empty in Barcelona, Spain, Sunday, March 15, 2020. Spain's government announced Saturday that it is placing tight restrictions on movements and closing restaurants and other establishments in the nation of 46 million people as part of a two-week state of emergency to fight the sharp rise in coronavirus infections. 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. (AP Photo/Joan Mateu)

For the second Sunday in a row, Francis delivered his noon remarks and blessing from inside the Apostolic Library instead of a window overlooking St. Peter's Square.

The Vatican also said it would close all Holy Week ceremonies to the public with the start of Palm Sunday on April 5. It said that until April

12, when Easter Sunday is celebrated this year, all the general audiences on Wednesday and Francis' Sunday noon prayer will be streamed.

Holy Week services usually draw tens of thousands to Rome but, with Italy at the epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak, tourism has vanished.

Spain joined Italy on lockdown after the government declared a two-week state of emergency.

"From now, we enter into a new phase," said Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, whose wife has tested positive. "We won't hesitate in doing what we need must to beat the virus. We are putting health first."



People look at an empty terrasse in Paris, Sunday, March 15, 2020. French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe announced that France is shutting down all

restaurants, cafes, cinemas and non-essential retail shops, starting Sunday, to combat the accelerated spread of the virus in the country. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (AP Photo/Christophe Ena)

In Barcelona, people who ventured out formed long lines to buy bread. Police patrolled parks and told people who were not walking their dogs to go home. The Las Ramblas promenade, the heart of the city and a tourist magnet, was eerily empty.

The state of emergency "is necessary to unify our efforts so we can all go in the same direction," Mayor Ada Colau said. "If we show solidarity and think about one another, we can get through this."

For now, the number of cases is still rising steeply. Spain's Health Ministry said the country has recorded 288 deaths, up from 136 on Saturday. The number of infections rose to 7,753 from 5,700.

The Netherlands ordered all schools, day-care centers, restaurants and bars to shut down until April 6. The new restrictions cover the country's famed marijuana-selling "coffee shops" and sex clubs. Health officials said eight more people died of the coronavirus, bringing the Dutch death toll to 20.



Catholic priest Catholic priest Jesus Higuera from the Santa Maria de Cana parish is seen on a smartphone during a live video streamed mass in Pozuelo de Alarcon, outskirts Madrid, Spain, Sunday, March 15, 2020. Pope Francis has praised people for their continuing efforts to help vulnerable communities, including the poor and the homeless, amid the coronavirus pandemic. The vast majority of people recover from the COVID-19. According to the World Health Organization, most people recover in about two to six weeks, depending on the severity of the illness. (AP Photo/Bernat Armangué)

Elsewhere, Morocco suspended all international flights and Turkey set aside quarantine beds for more than 10,000 people returning from Islam's holy sites in Saudi Arabia.

In China, where the virus was first detected in December, those arriving

on overseas flights were routed to an exhibition center for initial checks before being shuttled to their homes or other quarantine locations.

Even as social life largely halted—the German capital of Berlin closed bars, cinemas and other facilities Saturday evening—some attempts at keeping up public life persisted.

France, which has 4,500 infections and 91 deaths, went ahead Sunday with nationwide elections to choose mayors and other local leaders despite a crackdown on gatherings. The government ordered unprecedented sanitary measures, with election organizers having to keep a 1-meter (three-foot) gap between people and provide soap or hydro-alcoholic gel and disinfectant wipes for voting machines. Voters were told to bring their own pens.



A couple wash their hands before voting Sunday March 15, 2020 in Menton, southern France. France is holding nationwide elections Sunday to choose all of its mayors and other local leaders despite a crackdown on public gatherings because of the new virus. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (AP Photo/Daniel Cole)



People walk along La Ramblas in Barcelona, Spain, Sunday, March 15, 2020. Spain's government announced Saturday that it is placing tight restrictions on movements and closing restaurants and other establishments in the nation of 46 million people as part of a two-week state of emergency to fight the sharp rise in coronavirus infections. 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. (AP Photo/Emilio

Morenatti)



An employee in protective gears sprays disinfectant in the wake of coronavirus outbreak inside a train at the Senen train station in Jakarta Indonesia, Sunday, March 15, 2020. Indonesia's capital city announced a lockdown of all tourist destinations and entertainment spots as well as the closing all of its public schools for the next 14 days amid the global outbreak. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (AP Photo/Tatan Syuflana)



The highway leading to Barcelona is seen empty of cars on Sunday, March 15, 2020. Spain's government announced Saturday that it is placing tight restrictions on movements and closing restaurants and other establishments in the nation of 46 million people as part of a two-week state of emergency to fight the sharp rise in coronavirus infections. 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. (AP Photo/Emilio Morenatti)



In this photo taken on Friday, March 13, 2020, Francesco and Greta Innominati wave after placing a banner reading "Everything is gone be all right" out of a window of their apartment in Rome. The nationwide lockdown to slow coronavirus is still early days for much of Italy, but Italians are already are showing signs of solidarity. This week, children's drawings of rainbows are appearing all over social media as well as on balconies and windows in major cities ready, "Andra' tutto bene," Italian for "Everything will be alright." 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. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)



A South Korean army soldier wearing a protective suit sprays disinfectant as a precaution against the new coronavirus at a private academy in Daegu, South Korea, Sunday, March 15, 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. (Kim Hyun-tae/Yonhap via AP)



Catholic priest Rymond Ratilla presides over a mass that is live video streamed on their Facebook page at an empty Chapel of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Cubao, Quezon city, Philippines, Sunday, March 15, 2020. Mass was suspended at all churches in the capital to avoid large gatherings as part of precautionary measures against the spread of the new coronavirus in this largely Roman Catholic country. 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. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)



South Korean army soldiers wearing protective suits move to spray disinfectant in Daegu, South Korea, Sunday, March 15, 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. (Kim Hyun-tae/Yonhap via AP)



A couple wearing face masks wipe their hands after voting Sunday March 15, 2020 in Menton, southern France. France is holding nationwide elections Sunday to choose all of its mayors and other local leaders despite a crackdown on public gatherings because of the new virus. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (AP Photo/Daniel Cole)



In this Saturday, March 14, 2020 photo provided by Elizabeth Pulvermacher travelers returning from Madrid wait in a coronavirus screening line at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport. Long lines and hourslong waits for required medical screenings greeted weary travelers returning to some U.S. airports amid coronavirus-related travel restrictions. (Elizabeth Pulvermacher via AP)



In this Dec. 3, 2019, file photo, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and his wife Begona Gomez arrive at 10 Downing Street in London. Spain's government said Saturday March 14th, 2020 that the wife of Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has tested positive for the new coronavirus. It said Begona Gomez and the prime minister are in good health and following the instructions of medical authorities at their residence in La Moncloa Palace in Madrid, the government seat. The vast majority of people recover from the new coronavirus. According to the World Health Organization, most people recover in about two to six weeks, depending on the severity of the illness. (AP Photo/Alastair Grant, File)



The Pariser Platz in front of the Brandenburg Gate is almost empty in Berlin, Germany, Sunday, March 15, 2020. Berlin has closed all bars and pubs because of the coronavirus outbreak. 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/Markus Schreiber)



A shopper takes a picture at an empty shopping mall in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Sunday, March 15, 2020. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (AP Photo/Vincent Thian)



A police officer asks two women to leave the area in Barcelona, Spain, Sunday, March 15, 2020. Spain awoke to its first day of a nationwide quarantine on Sunday after the government declared a two-week state of emergency and put in place extraordinary measures including the confinement of people to their homes unless shopping for food and medicine, going to and from work, and to meet other basic needs. Restaurants and hotels are closed and public transport reduced. 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. (AP Photo/Joan Mateu)



People walk outside a closed cafe Sunday March 15, 2020 in Paris. French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe announced that France is shutting down all restaurants, cafes, cinemas and non-essential retail shops, starting Sunday, to combat the accelerated spread of the virus in the country. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (AP Photo/Rafael Yaghobzadeh)



People walk past the Colosseum in Rome, Sunday, March 15, 2020. Authorities around the world turned to increasingly drastic measures to try to slow the spread of the new coronavirus, with lockdowns, curfews and travel restrictions spreading. 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. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)

In Germany, which had reported nearly 3,800 cases and eight deaths nationwide, the state of Bavaria also held municipal elections, with poll workers wearing protective gloves.

Britain, which has not yet restricted everyday activities, said it plans to set out emergency powers this week, including potentially requiring people over 70 to self-isolate for up to four months and banning mass

gatherings.

"We will do the right thing at the right time," Health Secretary Matt Hancock told the BBC. "We will publish the bill this week coming."

In the Middle East, Muslim authorities announced that Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third-holiest site, would be closed indefinitely due to concerns about the outbreak, with prayers continuing to be held on the sprawling esplanade outside.

Dalia Samhouri, a regional official with the World Health Organization, said both Iran and Egypt, two of the most populous countries in the Mideast, were likely under-reporting cases because infected people can still show no visible symptoms. Iran says it has nearly 14,000 virus cases and 724 deaths, while Egypt has reported 110 cases, including two fatalities.

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Citation: Virus restrictions tighten, disrupting daily life, worship (2020, March 15) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-03-virus-restrictions-tighten-disrupting-daily.html>

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