

# Wuhan offers hope on virus front; Italy nears stark toll

March 19 2020, by David Rising, Nick Perry and Ken Moritsugu

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An office worker wearing a mask against coronavirus moves past lantern decorations in a mall and office building in Beijing on Thursday, March 19, 2020. China has only just begun loosening draconian travel restrictions within the country, but has stepped-up 14-day quarantine regulations on those arriving in Beijing, Shanghai and elsewhere from overseas, amid expectations of a new influx of students and others returning home. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

Thursday was a day of contrasts on the front lines of the battle against the new coronavirus. In a sign of hope, the Chinese city of Wuhan reported no new homegrown infections, but in a stark warning for the world, Italy appeared set to surpass China's death toll from the virus.

The two milestones were a dramatic illustration of how much the global outbreak has pivoted toward Europe and the United States. They also showed how the arc of contagion can vary in different nations, as Italy with 60 million people braces to see more carnage than China, a nation of 1.4 billion.

Italy registered 2,978 deaths on Wednesday after another 475 people died. Given that Italy has been averaging more than 350 deaths a day since March 15, it's likely to overtake China's 3,249 dead when Thursday's figures are released at day's end.

U.N. and Italian health authorities have cited a variety of reasons for Italy's high toll, key among them its large elderly population, who are particularly susceptible to developing serious complications from the virus. Italy has the world's second oldest population after Japan's and the vast majority of Italy's dead—87%—were over age 70.

In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says 80% of the nation's 138 deaths have taken place in people over 65. Overall, 8,900 patients have died around the world, and 84,000 have recovered. Aside from the elderly and the sick, most people only have mild or moderate symptoms, like a fever or cough.



A paramilitary police officer in a hazmat suit walks among pilgrims as he disinfects a tent built on a field where a mass congregation is supposed to be held in Gowa, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, Thursday, March 19, 2020. Indonesia halted the congregation of thousands of Muslim pilgrims and began quarantining and checking their health Thursday to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus. 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/Syaief)

In the meantime, the news from China's central city of Wuhan, where the virus first emerged late last year, offered a rare glimmer of hope and perhaps a lesson in the strict measures needed to halt its spread. It came as President Donald Trump likened the fight to "a war" and invoked emergency powers that allow him to compel manufacturers to deal with

the pandemic.

Wuhan once was the place where thousands lay sick or dying in hurriedly constructed hospitals, the first place in the world where medical facilities appeared overwhelmed. But Chinese authorities said Thursday that all 34 new cases recorded over the previous day had been imported from abroad.

"Today, we have seen the dawn after so many days of hard effort," said Jiao Yahui, a senior inspector at the National Health Commission.

While China did not report any new cases in Wuhan or Hubei province, it did record eight additional deaths. Wuhan has been under a strict lockdown since January. Officials are moving to loosen travel restrictions, but only inside the surrounding province of Hubei. Wuhan remains cut-off, with only those with special permission allowed to travel in or out.



A patient wears a protective face mask as she is loaded into an ambulance at The Brooklyn Hospital Center emergency room, Wednesday, March 18, 2020, in New York. Anticipating a spike in coronavirus patients, New York City-area hospitals are clearing out beds, setting up new spaces to triage patients and urging people with mild symptoms to consult health professionals by phone or video chat instead of flooding emergency rooms that could be overrun. (AP Photo/John Minchillo)

Still, the virus, which has infected 219,000 people around the world, took its toll elsewhere, both in human and economic terms.

European stock markets were up only slightly after losses in Asia despite a massive 750 billion-euro stimulus package announced overnight by the European Central Bank. Oil dropped below \$21 a barrel Wednesday for

the first time since 2002, and rose slightly Thursday to \$23.

The United Nations warned that the crisis could lead to the loss of nearly 25 million jobs around the world.

Elsewhere around the world, more borders shut, leaving some to wonder how they would get back home. In the Pacific, Australia and New Zealand shut out tourists, allowing only citizens and residents to return, while Fiji reported its first case, a worrying development in a region with poor healthcare.



Rio's Christ the Redeemer statue is lit up with the word Asia in support of those afflicted by the new coronavirus, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Wednesday, March 18, 2020. For most people COVID-19 causes mild or moderate symptoms. For

others, especially the elderly and people with existing health problems, it can cause many other serious illnesses, including pneumonia. (AP Photo/Silvia Izquierdo)

Iran's top leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei planned to pardon 10,000 more prisoners—among them an unknown number of inmates whose cases are political—in an apparent effort to combat the coronavirus, Iranian state TV reported. The country, where more than 1,100 people have already died from the virus, has already released 85,000 prisoners on temporary leave.

In London, home to almost 9 million, people were being urged to stay off public transport as authorities consider imposing tougher curbs on social distancing. London is the epicenter of Britain's coronavirus outbreak, with about one-third of its 2,644 cases.

Bavarian governor Markus Soeder said it may be necessary to implement a curfew in the southern German state if people don't start better following advice on restricting social contacts. In neighboring Austria, the western province of Tyrol put 279 municipalities under quarantine in light of a large number of COVID-19 infections there, banning anyone from leaving their towns or villages except to go to work in the Alpine region.



People walk along the Las Vegas Strip devoid of the usual crowds after casinos were ordered to shut down due to the coronavirus outbreak, Wednesday, March 18, 2020, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/John Locher)

The U.S. and Canada both closed their borders to all but essential travel and Trump said he plans to assert extraordinary powers to immediately turn back to Mexico anyone who crosses over the southern border illegally.

Russia and Mexico each reported their first death from the virus. Mexico closed its popular spring equinox visits to the Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon at Teotihuacan.

In the U.S., the Dow Jones Industrial Average shed more than 1,300



points on Wednesday, or over 6%, and has now lost nearly all of the gains it had posted since Trump's inauguration. The White House pressed Congress to swiftly pass a potentially \$1 trillion rescue package to prop up the economy and speed relief checks to Americans in a matter of weeks.

Calling himself a "wartime president," Trump invoked the Defense Production Act of 1950 to steer industrial output and overcome shortages of face masks, ventilators and other supplies as hospitals brace for an expected onslaught of cases.



A man wearing a mask goes past the Reserve Bank of Australia in Sydney, Thursday, March 19, 2020. Australia's central bank cut its benchmark interest rate by a quarter of a percentage point to a record low 0.25%, urgently seeking to alleviate economic shocks from the new coronavirus. (AP Photo/Rick Rycroft)



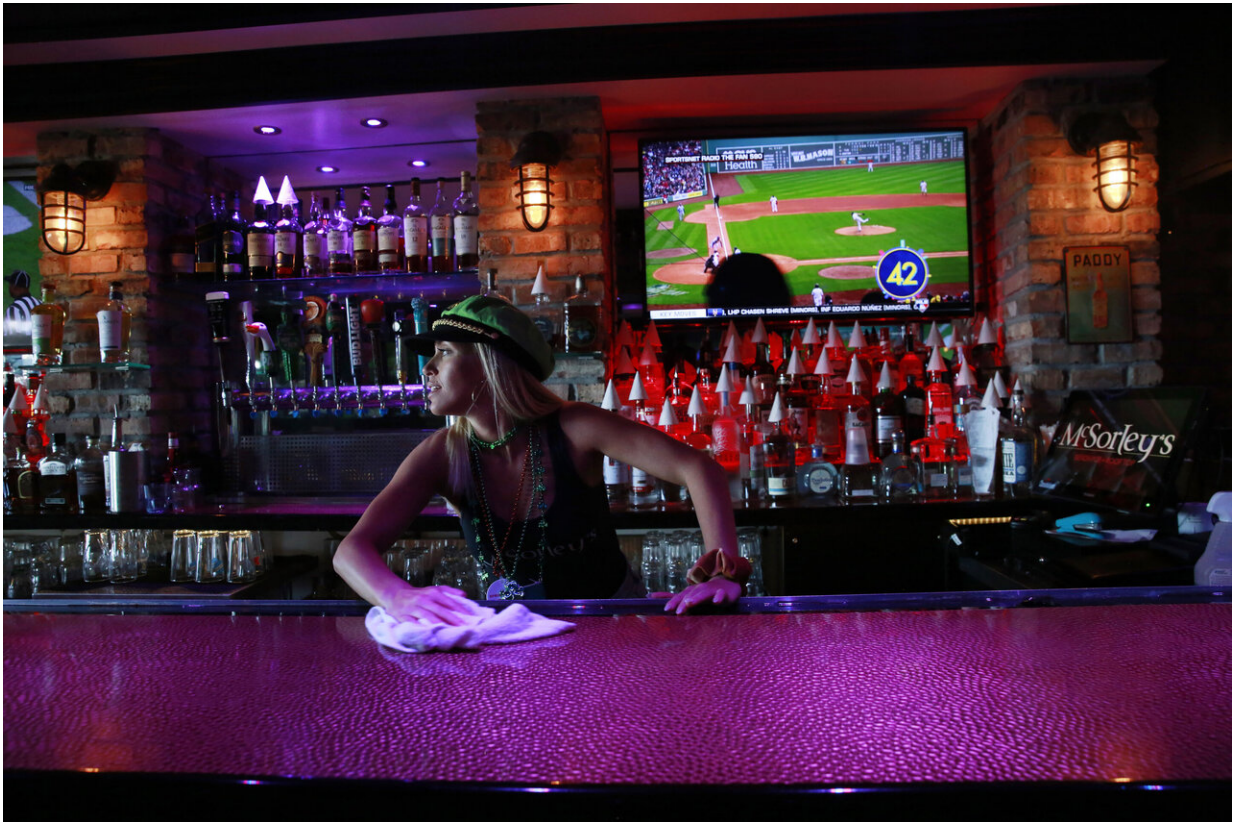
A musician without clients looks out on parked trajineras, the painted wooden boats popular with tourists and Mexican revelers that usually ply the canals of the Xochimilco district, in Mexico City, Wednesday, March 18, 2020. Few visitors were present Wednesday afternoon, and gondoliers and food vendors said business had dropped significantly from the previous week. While Mexico is still reporting a little more than 100 cases of the new coronavirus nationwide, concern among the population is growing, with more people in the capital opting to stay home or avoid crowds. (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)



A man is swabbed as he is tested for COVID-19 as vehicles line up at the Doris Ison Health Center, Wednesday, March 18, 2020, in Miami. The testing is being provided by Community Health of South Florida, Inc. According to the World Health Organization, most people recover in about two to six weeks, depending on the severity of the illness. (AP Photo/Lynne Sladky)



Lawmakers wearing face masks as a precaution against the spread of COVID-19 attend a session in Congress, in Guatemala City, Wednesday, March 18, 2020. Guatemala's President Alejandro Giammattei delivered his emergency economic relief plan spurred by the coronavirus crisis. (AP Photo/Moises Castillo)



Kelli Rizza cleans the bar before closing the doors of McSorley's Beach Pub at 5 o'clock on Tuesday, March 17, 2020, in Fort Lauderdale Fla. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, released a statement saying that all bars and nightclubs throughout Florida will close for the next 30 days. (AP Photo/Brynn Anderson)



People walk by an electronic stock board of a securities firm in Tokyo, Thursday, March 19, 2020. Shares in Asia failed to hold onto opening gains on Thursday, skidding further after the latest selloff on Wall Street. (AP Photo/Koji Sasahara)



Family members play darts on their patio as they self-quarantine in Barcelona, Spain, Wednesday, March 18, 2020. Spain will mobilize 200 billion euros or the equivalent to one fifth of the country's annual output in loans, credit guarantees and subsidies for workers and vulnerable citizens, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez announced Tuesday. For some it can cause more severe illness. For most people, the new COVID-19 coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. (AP Photo/Felipe Dana)



In this March 18, 2020 photo released by China's Xinhua News Agency, people applaud as departing medical workers enter Wuhan Tianhe International Airport in Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province. Last month, Wuhan was overwhelmed with thousands of new cases of coronavirus each day. But in a dramatic development that underscores just how much the outbreak has pivoted toward Europe and the United States, Chinese authorities said Thursday that the city and its surrounding province had no new cases to report. The virus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough, for most people, but severe illness is more likely in the elderly and people with existing health problems. (Ke Hao/Xinhua via AP)





In this March 18, 2020 photo, people stand in a spaced line as they wait to buy pork at the entrance gate of a closed residential community in Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province. Last month, Wuhan was overwhelmed with thousands of new cases of coronavirus each day. But in a dramatic development that underscores just how much the outbreak has pivoted toward Europe and the United States, Chinese authorities said Thursday that the city and its surrounding province had no new cases to report. The virus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough, for most people, but severe illness is more likely in the elderly and people with existing health problems. (Chinatopix via AP)



In this March 18, 2020 photo, people buy pork at the entrance gate of a closed residential community in Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province. Last month, Wuhan was overwhelmed with thousands of new cases of coronavirus each day. But in a dramatic development that underscores just how much the outbreak has pivoted toward Europe and the United States, Chinese authorities said Thursday that the city and its surrounding province had no new cases to report. The virus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough, for most people, but severe illness is more likely in the elderly and people with existing health problems. (Chinatopix via AP)



In this March 18, 2020 photo, people buy pork at the entrance gate of a closed residential community in Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province. Last month, Wuhan was overwhelmed with thousands of new cases of coronavirus each day. But in a dramatic development that underscores just how much the outbreak has pivoted toward Europe and the United States, Chinese authorities said Thursday that the city and its surrounding province had no new cases to report. The virus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough, for most people, but severe illness is more likely in the elderly and people with existing health problems. (Chinatopix via AP)

California's governor warned that martial law could be imposed. The mayor of New York said the city's 8.6 million residents should be prepared for a lockdown.

Ford, General Motors and Fiat Chrysler, along with Honda and Toyota, said they will shut all of their factories in the U.S., Canada and Mexico. The closing of Detroit's Big Three alone will idle about 150,000 workers, who are likely to receive supplemental pay in addition to unemployment benefits.

The U.S. has reported more than 9,400 [coronavirus](#) cases and at least 138 deaths, about half of them in Washington state, where dozens of residents from a suburban Seattle nursing home have died.

Scientists believe the true number of people infected in the United States is higher than reported because of the possibility that many mild cases have gone unrecognized and because of delays in ramping up testing.

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Citation: Wuhan offers hope on virus front; Italy nears stark toll (2020, March 19) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-03-wuhan-virus-front-italy-nears.html>

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