

# Europe's hospitals bow under the weight of coronavirus crush

April 3 2020, by John Leicester and Aritz Parra

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A general view a temporary field hospital set at Ifema convention and exhibition of in Madrid, Spain, Thursday, April 2, 2020. The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)

Setting up makeshift ICU wards in libraries and conference centers, embattled European medical workers strained Friday to save thousands of desperately ill coronavirus patients as stocks of medicine, protective equipment and breathing machines grew shorter by the hour.

A maelstrom of [coronavirus](#) deaths and job losses slammed the United States and Europe. Some 10 million Americans have been thrown out of work in just two weeks, the most stunning collapse the U.S. job market has ever witnessed. Global confirmed infections surged past 1 million and deaths hit 53,000, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University.

Experts say both numbers are seriously under-counted, due to the lack of testing, mild cases that were missed and governments that are deliberately underplaying the impact of the pandemic.

Europe's three worst-hit countries—Italy, Spain and France—surpassed 30,000 dead, over 56% of the world's [death](#) toll. From those countries, the view remained almost unrelentingly grim, a frightening portent even for places like New York, the epicenter of the U.S. outbreak, where trucks have been fork-lifting bodies outside overflowing morgues.

One Spanish hospital turned its library into a makeshift intensive-care unit. In France, space was being set aside for bodies in a vast food market. The French prime minister said he is "fighting hour by hour" to ward off shortages of essential drugs used to keep COVID-19 patients alive in intensive care.



A pedestrian wears a home made mask as a precaution amid the spread of the new coronavirus in Caracas, Venezuela, Thursday, April 2, 2020. (AP Photo/Ariana Cubillos)

Philippe Montravers, an anesthesiologist in Paris, said medics are preparing to fall back on older drugs, such as the opiates fentanyl and morphine, that had fallen out of favor, as newer painkillers are now in short supply.

"The work is extremely tough and heavy," he said. "We've had doctors, nurses, caregivers who got sick, infected ... but who have come back after recovering. It's a bit like those World War I soldiers who were injured and came back to fight."

Some glimmers of hope emerged that Italy, with nearly 14,000 dead, Spain and France might be flattening their infection curves and nearing or even past their peaks in daily deaths.

Spain on Friday reported 932 new daily deaths, just slightly down from the record it hit a day earlier. The carnage most certainly included large numbers of elderly people who authorities admit are not getting access to the country's limited breathing machines, which are being used first on healthier, younger patients. More than half of Spain's 10,935 deaths have come in the last seven days alone.



City workers fumigate a street to help contain the spread of the new coronavirus in La Paz, Bolivia, Thursday, April 2, 2020. (AP Photo/Juan Karita)

Some European officials are tentatively talking about the future, how to lift the nationwide lockdowns that have staved off the total collapse of strained health systems. Still, the main message across the continent was "stay at home."

In France, the government warned Parisians not to even think about going anywhere for the Easter school vacation starting this weekend, setting up roadblocks out of the city to nab those with antsy children trying to escape lockdowns.

Beyond Europe, coronavirus deaths mounted with alarming speed in New York, the most lethal hot spot in the United States, which has seen at least 1,500 virus deaths. One New York funeral home had 185 bodies stacked up—more than triple its normal capacity.

"It's surreal," owner Pat Marmo said, adding that he's been begging families to insist hospitals hold their dead loved ones as long as possible. "We need help."



Soldiers distribute food to people who cannot leave their homes during the lockdown enacted to help contain the spread of the new coronavirus in Quito, Ecuador, Thursday, April 2, 2020. COVID-19 causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death. (AP Photo/Dolores Ochoa)

Roughly 90% of the U.S. population is under stay-at-home orders, and many factories, restaurants, stores and other businesses are closed or have seen sales shrivel. Economists warned that U.S. unemployment would almost certainly top that of the Great Recession a decade ago and could reach levels not seen since the Great Depression in the 1930s.

"My anxiety is through the roof right now, not knowing what's going to



coronavirus outbreak. (Aaron Chown/ PA via AP)

Estimates in China, the world's second-largest economy, of those who have lost jobs or are underemployed run as high as 200 million. The government said Friday it would provide an additional 1 trillion yuan (\$142 billion) to local banks to lend at preferential rates to small- and medium-sized businesses.

With more than 245,000 people infected in the U.S. and the death toll topping 6,000, sobering preparations were underway. The Federal Emergency Management Agency asked the Pentagon for 100,000 more body bags.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. But for others, especially older adults and people with health problems, it can cause pneumonia and lead to death. The World Health Organization said this week that 95% of the deaths in Europe were of people who were over 60 years old.



"For Sale By Owner" and "Closed Due to Virus" signs are displayed in the window of Images On Mack in Grosse Pointe Woods, Mich., Thursday, April 2, 2020. The coronavirus outbreak has triggered a stunning collapse in the U.S. workforce with 10 million people losing their jobs in the past two weeks and economists warn unemployment could reach levels not seen since the Depression, as the economic damage from the crisis piles up around the world. (AP Photo/Paul Sancya)



Medical staff of a mobile unit take samples from people in cars to test for Covid-19 at a drive-through position at the Santa Maria della Pieta' hospital complex, in Rome, Friday, April 3, 2020. The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino) .



Medical staff of a mobile unit collects samples to test for Covid-19 from people at a drive-through position at the Santa Maria della Pieta' hospital complex, in Rome, Friday, April 3, 2020. The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino) .



A worker carries a crate loaded with bags of fruit and vegetables onto a van that will be delivered to frontline workers at three NHS hospitals, at Borough Market in London, Friday, April 3, 2020. 'Feed the Frontline', has initially been funded by private businesses throughout the month of April and aims to run throughout the peak of the COVID-19 coronavirus crisis. (AP Photo/Frank Augstein)



A man with a protective face mask to protect against the spread of the coronavirus walks through the shadows casted from a building Friday, April 3, 2020, in Tokyo. The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)



Borough Market managing director Darren Henaghan fills bags with fruit and vegetables that will be delivered to frontline workers at three NHS hospitals, at Borough Market in London, Friday, April 3, 2020. 'Feed the Frontline', has initially been funded by private businesses throughout the month of April and aims to run throughout the peak of the COVID-19 coronavirus crisis. (AP Photo/Frank Augstein)



In this Tuesday, March 31, 2020 file photo work continues at the ExCel centre which is being made into a temporary hospital called NHS Nightingale in London. In the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, soldiers are delivering millions of face masks to hospitals and helping to build makeshift medical facilities, including one at London's ExCel convention center that can treat as many as 4,000 patients. (Stefan Rousseau/Pool Photo via AP, File)



In this Tuesday, March 31, 2020 a paramedic is assisted in putting on a mask at St Thomas' Hospital, one of the many hospitals dealing with coronavirus patients in London. Britain's National Health Service, cornerstone of the nation's post-war welfare state, may be stretched to the breaking point in coming weeks as hospitals brace for an expected tsunami of critically ill patients when the coronavirus pandemic reaches its peak across the United Kingdom. (AP Photo/Kirsty Wigglesworth, File)



A man takes a photograph of mural on the side of Horse Vaults pub in honour of the NHS amid the growing coronavirus outbreak, in Pontefract, England, Friday April 3, 2020. (Danny Lawson/PA via AP)



In this Tuesday, March 31, 2020 signs in support of the British National Health Service staff who are fighting the coronavirus outbreak put up by students at the DLD College near St Thomas' Hospital, one of the many hospitals dealing with coronavirus patients in London. (AP Photo/Kirsty Wigglesworth, File)

White House coronavirus task force coordinator Dr. Deborah Birx said U.S. infection data suggested that Americans need to emulate those European nations that have started to see the spread of the virus slowing through strict social distancing.

The Trump administration was getting ready to recommend that ordinary Americans wear non-medical masks or bandannas over their mouths and noses when out in public so stocks of medical-grade masks could be preserved for those on the front lines.

Shortages of critical equipment led to fierce competition between buyers from Europe, the U.S. and elsewhere. A regional leader in Paris described the scramble to source masks a "worldwide treasure hunt."

French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said worldwide usage of essential drugs and disposable equipment, such as ventilator mouthpieces, used by intensive care units is "exploding in unimaginable proportions," with a "nearly 2,000 percent increase" in demand "because it is happening everywhere in the world and at the same time."

Gov. Andrew Cuomo warned that New York could run out of breathing machines in six days.

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