

'Tip of the iceberg:' Virus death toll seriously incomplete

April 17 2020, by Aritz Parra, Mike Corder and Joe McDonald



In this Feb. 1, 2020, file photo, funeral home workers remove the body of a person suspected to have died from the coronavirus outbreak from a residential building in Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province. The central Chinese city of Wuhan has raised its number of COVID-19 fatalities by more than 1,000. State media said the undercount had been due to the insufficient admission capabilities at overwhelmed medical facilities at the peak of the outbreak. (Chinatopix via AP, File)

China acknowledged Friday that the coronavirus death toll for epicenter of Wuhan was 50% higher than previously reported—a major revision that highlights just how seriously current numbers on infections and deaths around the globe may be understating the true toll of the pandemic.

Incomplete or unreliable figures about the pandemic take on an oversized influence during times of crisis, as medical staff struggle to figure out how to cope with surges of sick people and governments have to make crucial decisions about when and how they can begin easing lockdown restrictions to resuscitate their ailing economies.

As virus deaths mounted—with the United States reporting the nation's highest daily death toll yet at nearly 4,600—the economic devastation from the lockdowns designed to curb the spread of the coronavirus is becoming even more shocking.

Unemployment in the United States rose by 5.2 million, bringing the four-week total to a staggering 22 million. China's economy shrank 6.8% in the quarter ending in March from the same period a year ago, its worst contraction since before market-style economic reforms began in 1979. And in Europe, car sales tanked 55% last month amid the lockdowns, a drop twice as steep as even took place during the 2008-09 global financial crisis.

Authorities and experts say both infections and virus deaths have been under-reported almost everywhere. Thousands of people have died with COVID-19 symptoms—many in nursing homes, which have been ravaged by a disease that hits the elderly the hardest—without ever being tested. Four months into the outbreak, nations are still struggling to lift their testing capacities—and many are still far from their announced goals.



In this Thursday, April 16, 2020 photo, individual protection equipment used by healthcare staffers working with coronavirus patients at the intensive care unit (ICU) of the Clinica CEMTRO in Madrid, Spain. The clinic still attends to patients who require emergency treatment for orthopedic traumas, but the staff is mostly dedicated to the COVID-19 patients who are sent by the public hospitals that have been hugely overwhelmed in recent weeks. (AP Photo/Bernat Armangue)

Spain on Friday ordered the country's 17 autonomous regions to unify the criteria on counting the dead from the pandemic. Spain has counted more than 19,000 virus deaths out of more than 182,000 infections, but the system leaves out the patients who died with symptoms but were not tested.

"We are probably only seeing the tip of the iceberg, only a part of the cases that for sure are happening in Spain," Barcelona University epidemiologist Antoni Trilla, who heads the Spanish government's expert panel on the pandemic, told Cadena SER radio.

Britain's official death toll, which is approaching 14,000, has come under increasing scrutiny because it does not include any deaths at home or in nursing homes.

The country's statistics agency has indicated the actual number of deaths could be around 15% higher, though others think it will end up being a lot more than that amid growing reports of a sharp increase in coronavirus outbreaks in nursing homes.



In this Thursday, April 16, 2020 photo, a doctor takes his protective gear off after checking on coronavirus patients at the Clinica CEMTRO in Madrid, Spain. The clinic still attends to patients who require emergency treatment for orthopedic traumas, but the staff is mostly dedicated to the COVID-19 patients who are sent by the public hospitals that have been hugely overwhelmed in recent weeks.(AP Photo/Bernat Armangue)

Belgium's death toll jumped when it began including suspected COVID-19 victims in nursing homes. But the government insists its count injects much-needed transparency into the murky numbers.

"Accounting for suspicious cases is necessary. Especially in difficult situations where it is complicated to confirm cases," said Emmanuel Andre, a spokesman for Belgium's crisis center.

Worldwide, the outbreak has infected more than 2.1 million people and killed more than 145,000, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University, though the true numbers are believed to be much higher. The death toll in the U.S. topped 33,000, with more than 670,000 confirmed infections.

China raised its overall [death](#) toll to over 4,600 after the city of Wuhan, where the outbreak first took hold, added nearly 1,300 deaths. Questions have long swirled around the accuracy of China's case reporting, with some saying officials sought to minimize the outbreak that began in December.



In this Thursday, April 16, 2020 photo, Clinica CEMTRO medical director Angel Galindo, center, Dr. Francisco Garcia, right, and Dr. Barquillo, left, check COVID-19 patient health files at the Clinica CEMTRO in Madrid, Spain. The clinic still attends to patients who require emergency treatment for orthopedic traumas, but the staff is mostly dedicated to the COVID-19 patients who are sent by the public hospitals that have been hugely overwhelmed in recent weeks. (AP Photo/Bernat Armangué)

Africa could see 300,000 virus deaths even under the best-case scenario, according to a new report that cites modeling by Imperial College London. The continent as of Friday had more than 18,000 confirmed virus cases, but experts say Africa is weeks behind Europe in the pandemic and the rate of increase has looked alarmingly similar.

The spread of the virus is declining in such places as Italy, Spain and France, but rising or continuing at a high level in Britain, Russia and Turkey. Singapore reported a record daily high of 728 new cases as it ramped up testing at dormitories crammed with foreign workers.

Economists said U.S. unemployment could reach 20% in April, the highest since the Depression of the 1930s. Layoffs are spreading well beyond stores, restaurants and hotels to white-collar professionals such as software programmers and legal assistants.



In this Thursday, April 16, 2020 photo, healthcare staffers work in a lab on coronavirus testing kits at the Clinica CEMTRO in Madrid, Spain. The clinic still attends to patients who require emergency treatment for orthopedic traumas, but the staff is mostly dedicated to the COVID-19 patients who are sent by the public hospitals that have been hugely overwhelmed in recent weeks. (AP

Photo/Bernat Armangue)

President Donald Trump reacted to the pressure on the economy by outlining a phased approach to reopening parts of the country where the pandemic is being brought under control. He told the nation's governors that restrictions could be eased to allow businesses to reopen over the next several weeks in places that have extensive testing and a marked decrease in COVID-19 cases.

"We are not opening all at once, but one careful step at a time," Trump said.

New York, the deadliest virus hot spot in the U.S., reported more encouraging signs, with a drop in the daily number of deaths statewide and the overall count of people in the hospital.

"We've controlled the beast," Gov. Andrew Cuomo said. Still, New York state has over 40% of all U.S. deaths, and Cuomo extended the state's lockdown through at least May 15.



Homeless Sri Lankans watch another being disinfected before they are transported to an isolation center as a measure to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus during a lockdown in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Friday, April 17, 2020. Sri Lankan authorities claim they have largely managed to prevent community spreading through proper identification and isolation of people who came into contact with COVID-19 patients. (AP Photo/Eranga Jayawardena)

In New Jersey, police acting on an anonymous tip found at least 18 bodies over two days at a nursing home in Andover Township that were waiting to be picked up by a funeral home.

Like the U.S., many European countries have seen heavy job losses, but places like Germany and France are using government subsidies to keep millions of people on payrolls.

Not so in India, where 176 million people who live on under \$2 a day are getting more hungry and desperate by the hour as their incomes dry up under the government's strict [coronavirus](#) lockdown. Tens of thousands of newly jobless have walked miles to their ancestral villages in search of food and shelter, only to be shunned by locals who fear they are bringing the dreaded virus with them.

"These big leaders take decisions in their big houses!" said Rajesh Dhaikar, a balloon seller in Prayagraj in central India. "Did anyone ask the poor what they are eating?"



The recovered 68-year-old corona patient Mohammed S. from France lies on a stretcher as he leaves the university hospital in Essen, Germany, Friday, April 17, 2020. S. is a patient who received medical attendance at the hospital during his COVID-19 sickness caused by the new coronavirus. (Marcel Kusch/dpa via

AP)



In this Thursday, April 16, 2020 photo, healthcare workers put on protective gear in order to assist coronavirus patients at the intensive care unit (ICU) of the Clinica CEMTRO in Madrid, Spain. The clinic still attends to patients who require emergency treatment for orthopedic traumas, but the staff is mostly dedicated to the COVID-19 patients who are sent by the public hospitals that have been hugely overwhelmed in recent weeks. (AP Photo/Bernat Armangue)



In this Thursday, April 16, 2020 photo, a healthcare worker prepares protective gear at the intensive care unit (ICU) of the Clinica CEMTRO during the coronavirus outbreak in Madrid, Spain. The clinic still attends to patients who require emergency treatment for orthopedic traumas, but the staff is mostly dedicated to the COVID-19 patients who are sent by the public hospitals that have been hugely overwhelmed in recent weeks. (AP Photo/Bernat Armangue)



The recovered 68-year-old corona patient Mohammed S. from France sits in a wheelchair as he leaves the university hospital in Essen, Germany, Friday, April 17, 2020. S. is a patient who received medical attendance at the hospital during his COVID-19 sickness caused by the new coronavirus. (Marcel Kusch/dpa via AP)



Sri Lankan police officers distribute meals to homeless people before transporting them to isolation centers as a measure to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus during a lockdown in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Friday, April 17, 2020. Sri Lankan authorities claim they have largely managed to prevent community spreading through proper identification and isolation of people who came into contact with COVID-19 patients. (AP Photo/Eranga Jayawardena)



A Greek Orthodox priest takes part in a Holy Friday ceremony held without worshippers at a church in the northern city of Thessaloniki, Greece, during a lockdown order by the government to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, on Friday, April 17, 2020. Greek authorities are tightening lockdown enforcement against the COVID-19 during the Holy Week ahead of the Orthodox Easter, when Greeks traditionally flock to rural family homes for the most popular event on the country's religious calendar. Easter celebrations will be drastically scaled down, with church services held behind closed doors, even on April 19, Easter Day. (AP Photo/Giannis Papanikos)



Homeless Sri Lankans stand in a queue to bathe before they are transported to an isolation center as a measure to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus during a lockdown in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Friday, April 17, 2020. Sri Lankan authorities claim they have largely managed to prevent community spreading through proper identification and isolation of people who came into contact with COVID-19 patients. (AP Photo/Eranga Jayawardena)



A Greek Orthodox priest takes part in a Holy Friday ceremony held without worshippers at a church in the northern city of Thessaloniki, Greece, during a lockdown order by the government to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, on Friday, April 17, 2020. Greek authorities are tightening lockdown enforcement against the COVID-19 during the Holy Week ahead of the Orthodox Easter, when Greeks traditionally flock to rural family homes for the most popular event on the country's religious calendar. Easter celebrations will be drastically scaled down, with church services held behind closed doors, even on April 19, Easter Day. (AP Photo/Giannis Papanikos)



Issa Kassissieh holds a cross while wearing a protective face mask and gloves to help curb the spread of the coronavirus as he retraces the Via Dolorosa after the traditional mass procession was cancelled in Jerusalem's old city, Friday, April 17, 2020. Christians are commemorating Jesus' crucifixion without the solemn church services or emotional processions of past years, marking Good Friday in a world locked down by the coronavirus pandemic. (AP Photo/Ariel Schalit)



An employee holds up antibody test cartridges of the ichroma COVID-19 Ab testing kit used in diagnosing the coronavirus for a photograph on a production line of the Boditech Med Inc. in Chuncheon, South Korea, Friday, April 17, 2020. Boditech Med recently started exporting its antibody-based virus test kits to various countries. (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man)



In this Thursday, April 16, 2020, photo, a relative, barely wearing any protective gear other than face mask and latex gloves, sprinkles rose water on the body of a 52-year-old woman who died of COVID-19, during her burial at a cemetery in New Delhi, India. Of all the devastating consequences the coronavirus pandemic has brought to the world, the most painful may well be the lonely burials. It has forced a change in the way those left behind are mourning their dead, upending rituals carried out from generations. The deceased are not allowed a final hug from their loved ones to say farewell. And sometimes, they don't even get a proper burial. (AP Photo/Manish Swarup)



In this Thursday, April 16, 2020, photo, relatives use ropes to lower the body of a 52-year-old woman who died of COVID-19, into a freshly dug grave at a cemetery in New Delhi, India. The men then took turns and put handfuls of soil into the grave and stood at a distance. The earth mover inched closer, picked up the remaining soil in its metal jaws and covered the grave. Of all the devastating consequences the coronavirus pandemic has brought to the world, the most painful may well be the lonely burials. It has forced a change in the way those left behind are mourning their dead, upending rituals carried out from generations. The deceased are not allowed a final hug from their loved ones to say farewell. And sometimes, they don't even get a proper burial. (AP Photo/Manish Swarup)



In this Monday, April 13, 2020, photo a priest takes part in a Holy Monday ceremony held without worshippers at the Athens Cathedral, in Greece, during a lockdown order by the government to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. For Orthodox Christians, this is normally a time of reflection and communal mourning followed by joyful release, of centuries-old ceremonies steeped in symbolism and tradition. But this year, Easter - by far the most significant religious holiday for the world's roughly 300 million Orthodox - has essentially been cancelled. (AP Photo/Petros Giannakouris)



In this Thursday, April 16, 2020, photo the family of Ulyana Koryakova, second right, who are all members of a church community, watch a live broadcast as Russian Orthodox Church priest Father Igor conducts a religious service celebrating Great and Holy Thursday via YouTube live transmission from an empty church at their flat in Moscow, Russia. For Orthodox Christians, this is normally a time of reflection and joy, of centuries-old ceremonies steeped in symbolism and tradition. But this year, Easter - by far the most significant religious holiday for the world's roughly 300 million Orthodox - has essentially been cancelled. (AP Photo/Alexander Zemlianichenko)

For many of the world's roughly 300 million Orthodox Christians, Friday was a shadow of Easter's past as virus restrictions shut down traditional celebrations of the most important religious holiday in their calendar.

In Greece, roadblocks were set up and fines doubled for anybody caught driving without justification during the long weekend that usually sees families return to their ancestral villages to roast lamb in their gardens.

"This Easter is different. We will not go to our villages, we will not roast in our yards, we will not go to our churches. And of course, we will not gather in the homes of relatives and friends," government spokesman Stelios Petsas said. "For us to continue being together, this year we stay apart."

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