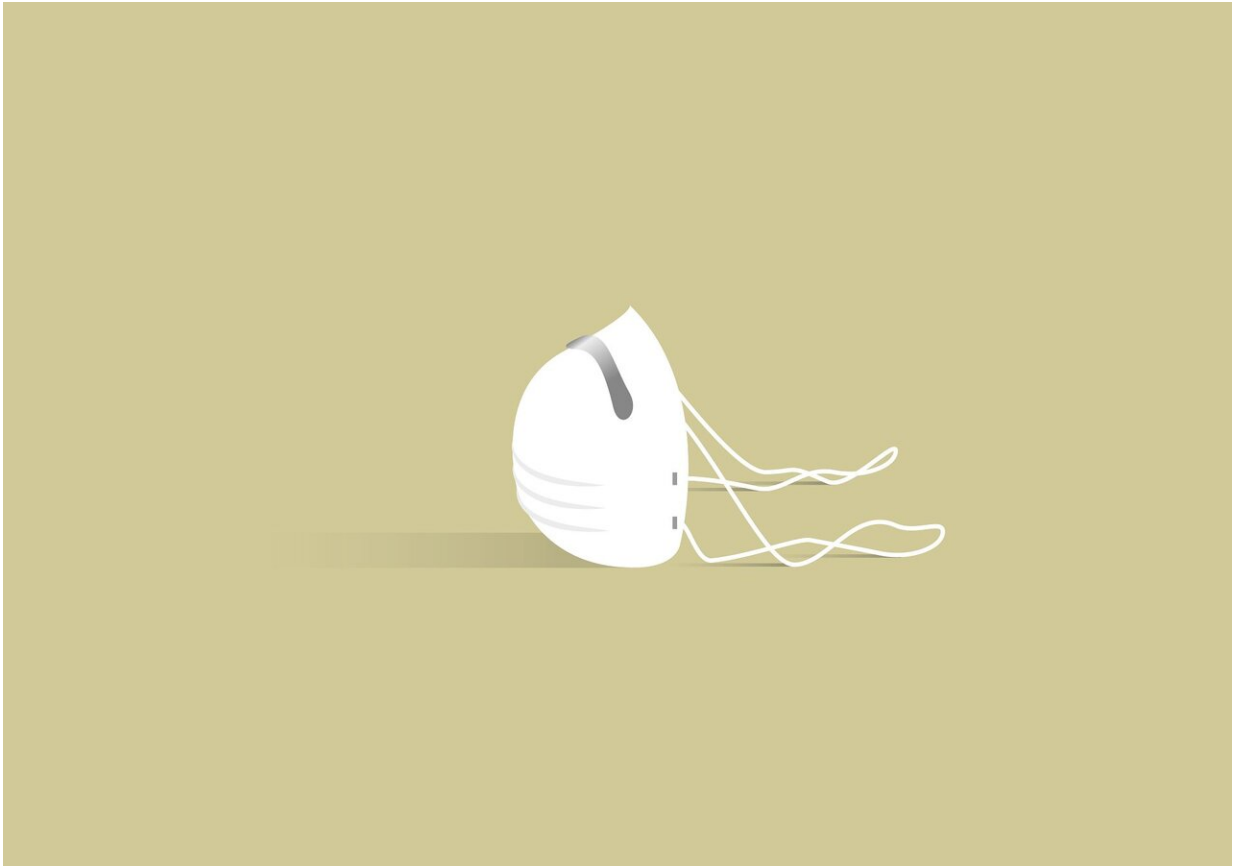


Italy cheers as virus cases level off

April 17 2020



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Italian health officials cheered Friday after the number of people currently being treated for COVID-19 rose by only a few hundred for the first time since the outbreak began.

Figures from the civil protection service showed the number of those receiving [hospital care](#) or recovering at home under medical supervision rising by 355 to 106,962 on Friday.

But the figure outside the outbreak's Italian epicentre in Milan's norther region of Lombardy went up by just 11 cases.

It went up by 344 in Lombardy itself.

The number had been rising by at least 1,000 a day nationally for over a month.

"In absolute terms, we have had had the highest number of recoveries since the start of the crisis," civil protection service chief Angelo Berrelli told reporters.

Italy's official death toll still rose by another 575 fatalities Friday to 22,745—second-most after the United States.

The number of people currently suffering from COVID-19 is counted separately from the number of new officially registered infections.

That number rose by 3,493 on Friday—about the same as it has been all week.

The generally improving picture prompted the civil protection service to announce that it was suspending daily briefings and moving to a twice-a-week format.

New tolls will still be issued daily.

Waiting for green light

The Italian government is waiting for the [green light](#) from leading doctors to start lifting an economically devastating lockdown that has left millions furloughed and unemployed.

The current restrictions are due to expire on May 4 and the government is planning to partially lift stay-at-home orders in regions where new cases have sharply dropped.

The government's public health council chief Franco Locatelli hinted Friday that regions south of Rome may be allowed to resume something resembling their old way of life next month.

"We have prevented the spread of contagions in southern regions. This is now a fact supported by (Friday's) figures," Locatelli said.

But the scale to which businesses are allowed to open across the economically vital north will be determined by the number of deaths and recoveries reported over the coming days.

Italy is still digging through data from individual regions to determine the health and economic effects of its worst crisis since World War II.

Previously undisclosed figures from its public health institute revealed that nearly 17,000 medics have been infected with the virus since Italy's first COVID-19 death was recorded on February 21.

Several Italian doctors have expressed fears that infected [health care workers](#) may have been unwittingly spreading the disease to their patients in the early weeks of the outbreak.

A study released Thursday by the FNOMCeO medical association said COVID-19 has killed 125 doctors in Italy.

Media reports Friday said that at least 34 nurses have also died of the disease.

Doctors believe that Italy's real [number](#) of deaths could be double the official figure in some of the worst-hit provinces around Milan.

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