

Lockdowns ease as global infections near 3 million

April 26 2020, by Thomas Perroteau With Afp Bureaus



Children in Spain were allowed out for the first time in six weeks as the country eased lockdown measures

Spanish children were allowed outside on Sunday for the first time in six

weeks as countries eased lockdown measures in a bid to slowly reopen economies gutted by the coronavirus pandemic that has infected nearly three million people worldwide.

Governments from France to Italy and the United States are starting to peel back severe restrictions that have kept more than half of humanity indoors for weeks on end.

Coronavirus cases around the world topped 2.9 million Sunday and deaths hit nearly 203,000 people, well over half of them in Europe, according to an AFP tally.

The daily toll in Western countries appeared to be levelling off and even falling in hard-hit countries, with numbers out of Italy, Spain and France stabilising in recent days.

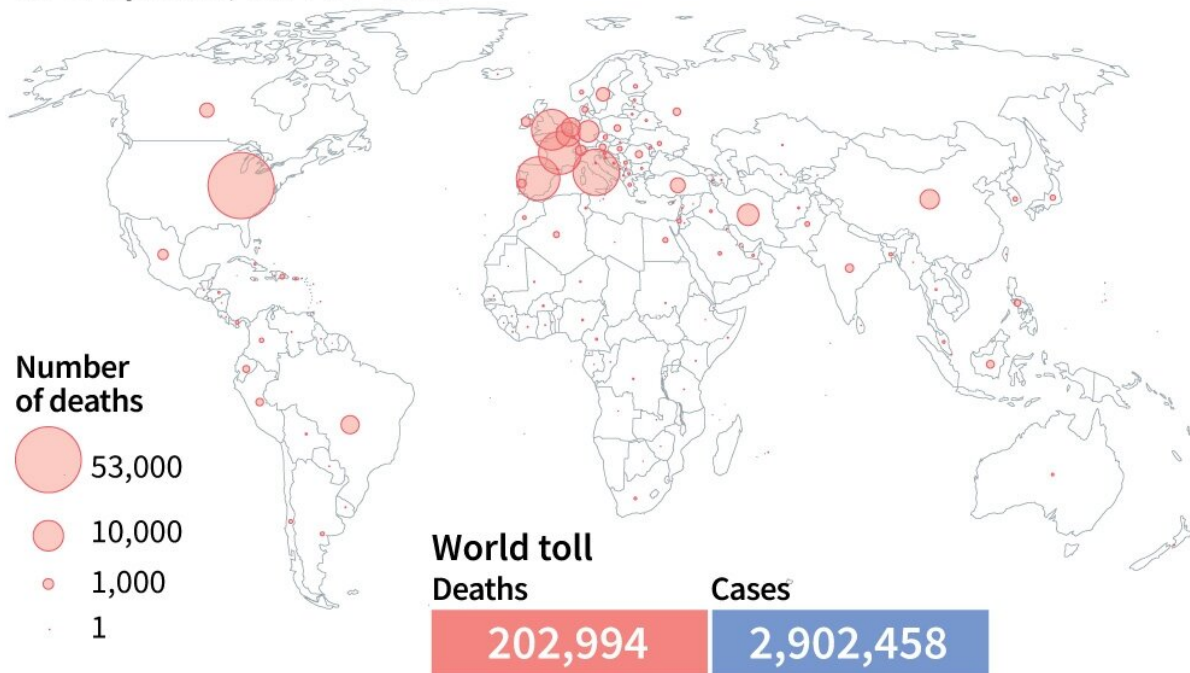
Governments are plotting a gradual reversal of lockdown measures to avoid a sudden rush back to normal life—and the risk of a second wave of infections—amid warnings from the World Health Organization that recovered people might not be immune to reinfection.

Spanish families embraced new rules allowing children outside for the first time since mid-March, with kids hopping on bicycles and scooters on the streets of Madrid—some wearing small masks and gloves.

"They are super excited, very, very impatient. They were up at 6:30 am, saying 'We are going out, We are going out!'," Inmaculada Paredes told AFP, readying to take her seven- and four-year-old kids outdoors.

Spread of the coronavirus

As of April 26, at 1100 GMT



Source: AFP count based on official data

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Global spread of coronavirus

Six-year-old Ricardo said it was "very good" to be out after a runaround with his younger sister in the city.

"We played hide and seek, we raced. We found a ladybug that was lost and we put it in among the ants," he told AFP.

Under the revised rules, children are allowed out once per day between 9:00 am and 9:00 pm, but cannot venture more than one kilometre (0.6 miles) from their homes.

The new rules were rolled out as the death toll in the hard-hit country dropped to 288 people on Sunday, the lowest since March 30.

With more than 23,000 fatalities, Spain has the third highest death toll in the world after Italy's 26,000 and more than 53,000 in the United States.

Other hard-hit countries across Europe are also starting to look toward a slow crawl back to normality.

Italy on Sunday said schools would reopen in September, while many business could resume work next week, and France was expected to unveil details of its de-confinement plan on Tuesday.



France will announce this week details of its de-confinement plans

Belgium said schools and businesses will reopen from mid-May, while shops in Germany started to reopen earlier this week.

And in Britain, where more than 20,000 have died, Prime Minister Boris Johnson was planning a return to work Monday after being treated in hospital for the virus, including three days in intensive care.

But his government resisted calls to ease nationwide restrictions, even as it reported its lowest daily death toll since March 31 on Sunday with 413 new fatalities.

Ramadan at home

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia on Sunday said it would partially lift its 24-hour curfew, allowing malls and retailers to open their doors during certain hours.

But the kingdom said it would maintain a round-the-clock lockdown in the Muslim holy city of Mecca.

Worshippers in the country joined hundreds of millions of Muslims around the world who marked the second day of Ramadan at home, avoiding traditional, large family meals to break their day-time fasts under social distancing rules.



Beachgoers crowded the shores in the US state of Georgia after lockdown restrictions were lifted there

Rejecting the advice of top disease experts, the US state of Georgia allowed thousands of businesses to resume operations, from hairdressers to bowling alleys.

"How long are we supposed to imprison ourselves?" said 30-year-old Mackenzie Scharf, one of many in Georgia embracing the return to something resembling normalcy.

"This is much safer than going grocery shopping," she told AFP on the beach at Tybee Island, where her five-year-old son flew a kite under a cloudless sky.

US President Donald Trump has repeatedly said he wants to resume business in the world's biggest economy, even as medical advisors have cautioned against easing lockdown too soon or too fast.

The US leader faced a fresh volley of criticism after suggesting that [coronavirus](#) could be treated by shining ultraviolet light inside patients' bodies, or with injections of household disinfectant.

He lashed out at the media on Twitter, accusing journalists of posing hostile questions, and suggested his daily coronavirus briefings were not worth his time.

"They get record ratings, & the American people get nothing but Fake News. Not worth the time & effort!," Trump wrote.



Workers from a funeral home company near Cuneo in northwestern Italy prepare to hold a service for a coronavirus victim

Immunity warning

While new reported cases appear to have plateaued at about 80,000 a day, the world remains in wait as companies and governments race to develop treatments and, eventually, a vaccine for the virus.

Some governments are studying measures such as "immunity passports" as one way to get people back to work after weeks of shutdowns that have roiled the global economy.

"If I've already had corona then I'm not infectious," said Berlin resident Lothar Kopp, hoping to test positive for antibodies as it could allow him to visit his elderly mother.

But the WHO warned that people who survive infection cannot be certain they will not be hit again by the respiratory disease, which first emerged in China late last year.

"There is currently no evidence that people who have recovered from #COVID19 and have antibodies are protected from a second infection," the UN health body said in a statement.



Medical workers in China's northeastern Heilongjiang province conduct coronavirus contact tracing

Several countries, including France and Germany, are planning to introduce coronavirus tracing apps to alert users if they are near someone who has tested positive.

The technology has already rolled out in Australia, sparking privacy concerns among some, and has been widely used in Singapore too.

Meanwhile in Beijing, a new set of regulations were introduced to combat the pandemic, banning "uncivilised" behaviour such as not covering the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.

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