

Hopes rise in virus battle as US scientists hail drug trial

April 30 2020, by Shaun Tandon With Afp Bureaus



Members of the medical team at the intensive care unit of the Nicosia General Hospital cheer as a patient suffering from the COVID-19 is transferred from their unit to the recovery section

US scientists have hailed a potential breakthrough in the coronavirus

fight after a trial showed patients responding to an antiviral drug, fueling global hopes for a return to normal despite mounting deaths and abysmal economic figures.

The news was enough to propel a rebound on Wall Street even after data showed the pandemic had plunged the United States into its worst economic slump in a decade, and Germany predicted its biggest recession since the aftermath of World War II.

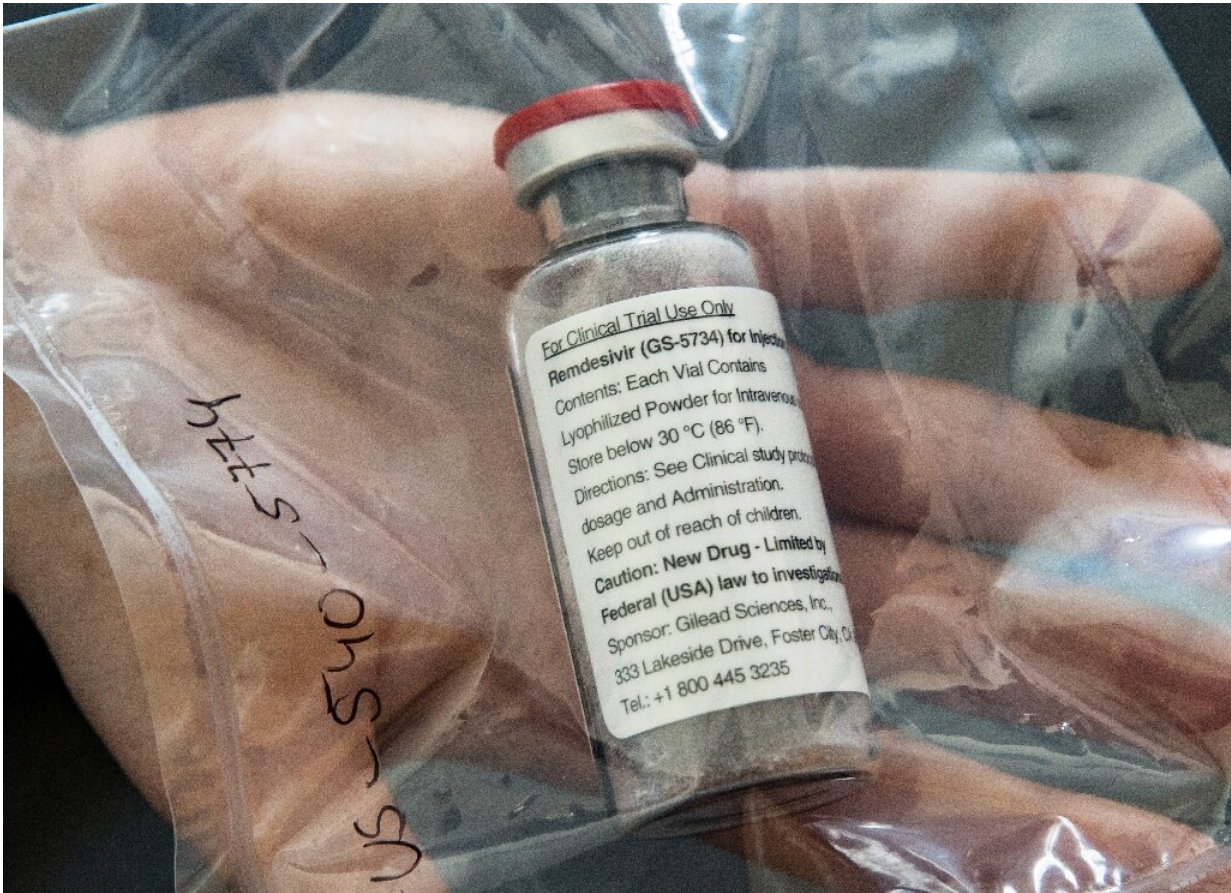
It came as the World Health Organization's emergency committee was due to meet Thursday for the first time in three months to discuss the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic that has claimed more than 226,000 lives worldwide.

A clinical trial of the drug remdesivir showed that patients recovered about 30 percent faster than those on a placebo, in the first proof of successful treatment against the new disease.

"The data shows that remdesivir has a clear-cut, significant, positive effect in diminishing the time to recovery," Anthony Fauci, the top US epidemiologist who oversaw the study, told reporters.

Fauci likened the finding to the first retrovirals that worked, albeit with modest success, against HIV in the 1980s.

Remdesivir failed in trials against the Ebola virus and a smaller study, released last week by the WHO, found limited effects among patients in Wuhan, China, where the illness was first detected in December.



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Senior WHO official Michael Ryan declined to weigh in on the latest findings, saying he had not reviewed the complete study.

"We are all hoping—fervently hoping—that one or more of the treatments currently under observation and under trial will result in altering clinical outcomes" and reducing deaths, he said.

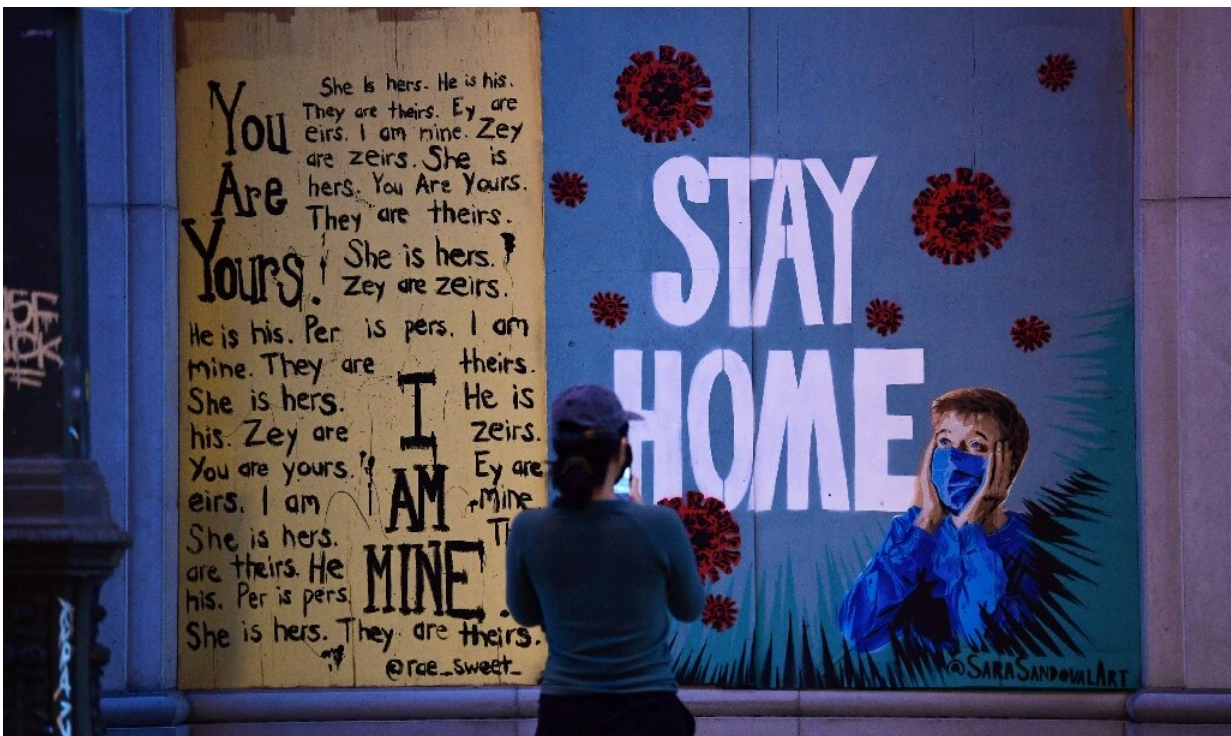
US President Donald Trump has accused the UN health agency of not responding quickly or aggressively enough, although critics say he is

trying to deflect attention from his own response.

Itching to return to the campaign trail as he faces re-election, Trump announced he would resume travel next week with an event in the battleground state of Arizona—but not yet resume rallies, as contagion remains a risk.

'Unprecedented' contraction

US virus fatalities soared past 60,000 on Wednesday. The country has suffered the most deaths, with Britain's toll shooting up to the world's third worst at over 26,000.



A woman stops to view a public art installation aimed at turning boarded up shopfronts into works of art in Los Angeles

More than 27,000 people have died in Italy.

Florida became the latest US state to move to reopen, with restaurants able to serve customers outdoors from Monday if tables are at least six feet (1.8 meters) apart.

Experts have warned that only a vaccine will allow the full removal of restrictions that this year put half of humanity under some form of lockdown.

Governments are nevertheless increasingly loosening the more suffocating rules as their devastating impact on the [global economy](#) becomes clearer.

The US announced that economic output collapsed 4.8 percent in the first quarter—ending more than a decade of expansion.

Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell warned that economic activity will likely drop "at an unprecedented rate" in the second quarter, in grim news for Trump.

Germany, Europe's largest economy, has succeeded in holding off the devastating death tolls seen elsewhere, but is still bracing for an overwhelming economic hit.



A hall in Saint Petersburg's Moskovsky railway station is disinfected amid the coronavirus pandemic

Germany "will experience the worst recession in the history of the federal republic" founded in 1949, Economy Minister Peter Altmaier warned, predicting that GDP would shrink by a record 6.3 percent.

The International Labour Organization said half the global workforce—around 1.6 billion people—are in "immediate danger of having their livelihoods destroyed."

One of the worst-hit sectors is the aviation industry.

World air traffic suffered a massive drop of more than half in March

compared with the same period last year—the "largest decline in recent history," the International Air Transport Association said.

US plane-builder Boeing announced plans to reduce its workforce by 10 percent and slash production while European giant Airbus also reported big losses.

An unprecedented drop in demand for fossil fuels means the pandemic is expected to cause global energy emissions to fall a record eight percent this year, the International Energy Agency said Thursday.



British World War II veteran Captain Tom Moore, who turns 100 on April 30, poses with his walking frame doing a lap of his garden in the village of Marston Moretaine

Risks to children

While the world keeps looking for signs of progress against the pandemic, research is also revealing frightening new details about COVID-19.

Britain and France have both warned of a possible [coronavirus](#)-related syndrome emerging in children—including abdominal pain and inflammation around the heart.

"I am taking this very seriously. We have absolutely no medical explanation at this stage," French Health Minister Olivier Veran said.

Experts have also warned of longer-term psychological tolls on both children and adults after weeks or even months in isolation.

Unlike much of continental Europe, Britain has not unveiled a way to exit the lockdown.

The sharp rise in its COVID-19 toll, which caused Britain to surpass Spain, came as it included deaths in places such as care homes for the first time.



Rickshaw drivers in Rawalpindi gather at a food distribution site set up by the traffic police during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown



All truck drivers ferrying goods crossing the border from Kenya into Uganda must take a test for COVID-19 by Ugandan health officials and wait 24 hours to get the result



Suzanne Valette, an 88-year-old infected with COVID-19, talks to her son through plexiglass at the Buissonnets retirement home in Horion-Hozemont, Belgium



Students eat their lunch on desks with plastic partitions as a preventive measure to curb the spread of the coronavirus at Dajia Elementary School in Taipei

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson initially resisted shutting down the country—and himself became the highest-profile coronavirus patient, fighting for his life in intensive care.

He returned to work this week and on Wednesday became a father again when his partner Carrie Symonds gave birth to a boy.

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