

Wuhan ends lockdown as health workers buckle under strain

April 8 2020, by Danica Kirka and Elena Becatoros



A health worker wearing personal protective gear inside a testing tent, gestures colleagues during the screening and testing for COVID-19, in Lenasia, south of Johannesburg, South Africa, Wednesday, April 8, 2020. South Africa and more than half of Africa's 54 countries have imposed lockdowns, curfews, travel bans or other restrictions to try to contain the spread of COVID-19. 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/Themba Hadebe)

After 76 days in lockdown, the Chinese city at the heart of the global pandemic reopened Wednesday, and tens of thousands immediately hopped on trains and planes to leave. Elsewhere, the economic, political and psychological toll of fighting the virus grew increasingly clear and more difficult to bear.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson spent a second night in intensive care with his country in the grips of its biggest crisis since World War II. The 55-year-old Johnson, the first major world leader confirmed to have COVID-19, was stable and responding to treatment, spokesman James Slack said.

Across the Atlantic, New York City endured one of its darkest days yet, with the [death](#) toll surging past 4,000, hundreds more than the number killed on 9/11. New York state recorded 731 new [coronavirus](#) deaths on Tuesday, its biggest one-day jump yet, for a statewide total of nearly 5,500.

New York's mayor acknowledged Wednesday that the true death toll is even higher because the city's count does not include people who died at home without ever being tested for the virus.

"We're talking about something like 100, 200 people per day," Bill de Blasio said on CNN.

Across the U.S., the death toll reached about 13,000, with approximately 400,000 confirmed infections. Some of the deadliest hot spots were Detroit, New Orleans and the New York metropolitan area.



A worker directs travelers wearing face masks and suits to protect against the spread of new coronavirus at Wuhan Tianhe International Airport in Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province, Wednesday, April 8, 2020. Within hours of China lifting an 11-week lockdown on the central city of Wuhan early Wednesday, tens of thousands people had left the city by train and plane alone, according to local media reports. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

More economic pain was felt. Japan, the world's third-largest economy, could contract by a record 25% this quarter, the highest since gross domestic product began to be tracked in 1955. The dismal prediction by two economists said exports are expected to dive 60% in the April-June period.

The Bank of France said the French economy has entered recession,

with an estimated 6% drop in the first quarter compared with the previous three months, while Germany, Europe's economic powerhouse, is also facing a deep recession. Expert said its economy will shrink 4.2% this year.

European governments have been scrambling to put together hundreds of billions of euros to save lives and prevent bankruptcies. The countries worst hit by the virus are among those that can least afford the costs, like Italy and Spain. But they disagree over how to tackle the challenge.



A relative of Margodt Genevieve, who died due to Covid-19, grieves over her coffin during her funeral ceremony at the Montignies cemetery in Charleroi, Belgium, Wednesday, April 8, 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/Francisco Seco)

With European health workers toiling round the clock in a desperate bid to save lives, the psychological toll is becoming unbearable.

Weeks into Italy's outbreak, two nurses have killed themselves and more than 70 doctors and 20 nurses have died from the virus. Hospitals are making therapists available to help staff cope with the effects of seeing so much death. Italy is the hardest-hit country overall, with over 17,000 deaths.

In Spain, nurse Diego Alonso said he and colleagues have been using tranquilizers to cope.

"The psychological stress from this time is going to be difficult to forget. It has just been too much," he said.

Spain's Health Ministry on Wednesday reported 757 new deaths, bringing the total to more than 14,500, and 6,180 new infections. Both figures were slightly higher than Tuesday's, when the first increase in five days was explained by a backlog of test results and unreported weekend fatalities.



A video screen displays a message urging people to stay home, at Piccadilly Circus in London, Wednesday, April 8, 2020. The highly contagious COVID-19 coronavirus has impacted on nations around the globe, many imposing self isolation and exercising social distancing when people move from their homes. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham)

Spanish authorities have acknowledged that laboratory bottlenecks and a shortage of testing kits are giving an incomplete picture of the disaster.

In Wuhan, the Chinese city of 11 million where the pandemic began, residents waved flags and the city staged a light show with skyscrapers and bridges radiating images of health workers helping patients.

Restrictions in the city where most of China's more than 82,000 virus

cases and over 3,300 deaths were reported have been gradually eased in recent weeks as new cases declined.

"I haven't been outside for more than 70 days," said Tong Zhengkun. "Being indoors for so long drove me crazy."

In Washington, President Donald Trump threatened to freeze U.S. funding to the World Health Organization, saying the U.N. agency had "missed the call" on the pandemic. He suggested that WHO went along with Beijing's efforts months ago to minimize the outbreak's severity.



A coronavirus patient under treatment in the intensive care unit uses the touch screen of a robot at 'Ospedale di Circolo' hospital, in Varese, Italy, Wednesday, April 8, 2020. Six robots help healthcare professionals assist Covid-19 patients, one robot for every two patients to maximize monitoring and assistance. 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/Luca Bruno)

WHO has praised China for its transparency on the virus despite wide skepticism among experts about the country's actual number of infections and deaths.

Some African leaders bristled at Trump's attack on WHO, especially after its head, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus of Ethiopia, spoke up this week against "racist" comments by two French doctors who said a coronavirus vaccine could be tested in Africa. Tedros condemned the French remarks as showing a "colonial mentality."

"Surprised to learn of a campaign by the U.S. govt against WHO's global leadership. The African Union fully supports WHO and Dr. Tedros," AU chief Moussa Faki Mahamat tweeted.

In Europe, Britain and France appeared to be at different stages of the crisis than Italy, where new infections and virus deaths were declining daily. Deaths in Britain reached nearly 6,200 after a one-day increase Tuesday of 786, its highest figure yet, while in France, the number of dead climbed to more than 10,300.



Barbecue pits are closed at a beach as a social gathering deterrent to help curb the spread of the coronavirus, in Hong Kong, Wednesday, April 8, 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/Kin Cheung)



An officer checks the quality as Jammu and Kashmir police personnel make face masks and personal protective gear amid COVID-19 outbreak in Jammu, India, Wednesday, April 8, 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/Channi Anand)



A group of select devotees take part during the Holy Wednesday Mass at Santa Maria Cathedral, in Pamplona, northern Spain, Wednesday, April 8, 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/Alvaro Barrientos)



Personal cleaner looks out from a window at the Padre Zurita residence in Alcorcon, Spain, Wednesday, April 8, 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)



An employee of cake shop prepares chocolate Easter bunnies with masks in Lykovrisi, northern Athens, on Wednesday, April 8, 2020. Cake shops and bakeries in Greece have remained open during a strict circulation ban in Greece to contain the spread of the COVID-19, but authorities have intensified a crackdown on lockdown violations ahead of Easter, which is celebrated by Orthodox Christians on April 19. Greece's Orthodox Church says it will not permit any public gatherings for Easter services. (AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis)



An aerial view of Paris taken from a balloon which measures air quality during a nationwide confinement to counter the Covid-19, Wednesday, April 8, 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/Christophe Ena)



An ultra-Orthodox Jew crosses a mainly deserted street because of the government's measures to help stop the spread of the coronavirus, in Bnei Brak, Israel, Wednesday, April 8, 2020. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced Monday a complete lockdown over the upcoming Passover feast to control the country's coronavirus outbreak, but offered citizens some hope by saying he expects to lift widespread restrictions after the week-long Jewish holiday. (AP Photo/Oded Balilty)



A man with protective mask rides an empty train Wednesday, April 8, 2020, in Tokyo. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declared a state of emergency yesterday for Tokyo and six other prefectures to ramp up defenses against the spread of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)



Volunteers in protective suits to help curb the spread of the coronavirus prepare to disinfect public areas in Kabul, Afghanistan, Wednesday, April 8, 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/Rahmat Gul)



Workers build a fence to block the view of the ambulance entrance area outside St Thomas' Hospital in central London, where Prime Minister Boris Johnson remains in intensive care as his coronavirus symptoms persist, Wednesday, April 8, 2020. Johnson has spent his second night in hospital intensive care. 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/Matt Dunham)



An Indian health worker checks the temperature of a man during lockdown to prevent the spread of new coronavirus in Ahmedabad, India, Wednesday, April 8, 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/Ajit Solanki)

Worldwide, more than 1.4 million people have been confirmed infected and over 80,000 have died, according to Johns Hopkins University. The true numbers are almost certainly much higher, because of limited testing, different rules for counting the dead and deliberate underreporting by some governments.

For most, the virus causes mild to moderate symptoms such as fever and cough. But for some older adults and the infirm, it can cause pneumonia

and death. Over 300,000 people have recovered.

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