

New Zealand tames virus; France, Spain reveal lockdown exits

April 28 2020, by Angela Charlton, Elena Becatoros and Nick Perry



People with shopping pass by a closed bar in Madrid, Spain, Tuesday, April 28, 2020. Official statistics show that Spain's unemployment rate rose to 14.4% in the first quarter of 2020, reflecting only the partial impact of the new coronavirus pandemic in Spain's job market. Spain's left-wing coalition government is poised to announce Tuesday further steps to ease the 7-week lockdown, one of the world's strictest. (AP Photo/Paul White)

France and Spain, two of the worst-hit countries in the coronavirus pandemic, were laying out separate roadmaps Tuesday for lifting their lockdowns, while signs emerged that the virus has been all but vanquished in New Zealand and Australia.

But on the other side of the globe, Brazil was emerging as a new hotspot for infections. And new doubts were raised over whether Japan would be able to host the already postponed Summer Olympics next year without the development of a vaccine.

The key question of when to reopen schools loomed around the world as nations seek to restart their battered economies.

Although the coronavirus seems to affect children far less seriously than adults, many officials, teachers and parents are concerned about the [health risks](#) that school openings could pose. Some point to the difficulties of ensuring that children stick to social distancing and frequent hand washing, and to the health risks for teachers.

But many parents would struggle to return to work without schools being open, hampering efforts to counter the world's deep economic tailspin.

In France, President Emmanuel Macron wants schools to start reopening May 11, but teachers, parents and some mayors are raising alarms. The government says parents can decide whether to send their children back to class and is releasing more details later Tuesday.



Surfers enjoy a sunrise surf at Sumner Beach as level four COVID-19 restrictions are eased in Christchurch, New Zealand, Tuesday, April 28, 2020. New Zealand eased its strict lockdown restrictions to level three at midnight to open up certain sections of the economy but social distancing rules will still apply. (AP Photo/Mark Baker)

Joel Wilmotte is among a growing number of French mayors refusing to re-open their schools, at least for now.

"I am not against the reopening of schools," he said on the Facebook page of his northern town of Hautmont.

But he listed seven reasons why he's not ready to do so, including ill-equipped teachers and cleaning staff and a poll that suggests that most French parents oppose school reopenings. So he's keeping his town's six

schools closed "until further notice."

Greece, which has managed to keep its coronavirus death toll low at 136 people, was also releasing more details Tuesday about easing its lockdown but schools remained a tricky topic.

Schools will be reopened "gradually, with conditions" and subject to constant review, said the Health Ministry's coronavirus spokesman, infectious diseases specialist Sotiris Tsiodras. No opening date has yet been set.



A staff member wearing a face mask against the spread of the new coronavirus works at a restaurant in Tokyo Tuesday, April 28, 2020. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)

Scientists agree children are less at risk from the virus and appear to transmit it less than adults, said Tsiodras.

Hard-hit Italy, however, is keeping schools closed until September. That is putting parents in the difficult position of returning to work without access to their typical fallback babysitters: grandparents, who are now considered off-limits because they are the most vulnerable to the virus.

Emer McCarthy, who works in the Vatican's child protection office, tweeted that Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte had addressed a lockdown exit "for everyone except Italy's children. Incredible. No mention of schools, childcare options, nothing. But football yes. #ChildrenNotSeenNotHeard."

In China, where the pandemic began, schools began opening on Monday, but only to seniors at middle and high school levels preparing for exams. Class sizes were cut to no more than 30.



A Red Cross worker checks people's temperatures during the measures against the new coronavirus at the main entrance of a lower court complex buildings in Athens on Tuesday, April 28, 2020. Lower courts and the state property registry reopened Tuesday, beginning an easing on lockdown measures due the COVID-19 in Greece, where infection rates have remained relatively low. A broader and staggered easing program will start on May 4. (AP Photos/Thanassis Stavrakis)

China's daily number of new cases has fallen into the single digits, but authorities remain vigilant over the possibility of a second wave of infections.

In the United States, which has the world's highest death toll at more than 56,000, President Donald Trump said states should "seriously

consider" reopening their public schools before the end of the academic year, even though dozens already have said it would be unsafe for students to return until the summer or the fall.

"Some of you might start thinking about school openings, because a lot of people are wanting to have the [school](#) openings," Trump said. " Young children have done very well in this disaster."

Trump also admitted the number of virus deaths could reach 70,000 in the U.S., after citing 60,000 several times this month.

The number of confirmed infections worldwide has risen to over 3 million and the confirmed death toll has topped 211,000, [according to a tally](#) by Johns Hopkins University. The true toll of the pandemic is likely much higher because of limited testing, mild cases that are missed, flaws in counting the dead and governments that may be trying to conceal the extent of their outbreaks.



An employee wearing a face mask works on a door of a Yaris car at the Toyota car factory in Onnaing, northern France, Tuesday, April 28, 2020. Workers are returning the Toyota factory as the country tries to carefully restart an economy deeply damaged by virus confinement measures. First, the workers are being tested for the virus, given protective equipment and taught how to protect themselves from infection in the workplace. Then some of the plant's 4,500 employees start back to work. (AP Photo/Michel Spingler)

Italy, Spain, France and Britain accounted for more than 21,000 virus-related deaths each.

In Brazil, President Jair Bolsonaro has insisted COVID-19 is just a "little flu" and claimed there is no need for the type of restrictions that have slowed the infection's spread elsewhere.

Brazil, Latin America's most populous country with 211 million people, has reported 4,600 deaths and 67,000 confirmed infections. But the true numbers are believed to be vastly higher given the lack of testing and the many people who haven't sought hospital care.

Medical officials in Rio de Janeiro and at least four other major Brazilian cities have warned that their hospital systems are on the verge of collapse or are too overwhelmed to take any more patients. There are also signs that a growing number of Brazilian victims are dying at home.



Homeless men stand against the wall on the street of downtown Johannesburg, South Africa, Tuesday, April 28, 2020. Many have lost their income as South Africa is under a strict five-week lockdown in a effort to fight the coronavirus pandemic. (AP Photo/Themba Hadebe)

"We have all the conditions here for the pandemic to become much more serious," said Paulo Brandão, a virologist at the University of Sao Paulo.

Bolsonaro says Brazilians need to resume their lives to prevent an economic meltdown but most state governors have adopted restrictions to keep people home and slow the virus's spread.

New Zealand, on the other hand, reported just three new infections Tuesday. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said people had done an incredible job of breaking the chain of virus transmission but cautioned they needed to remain vigilant.

"There may still be some smoldering ashes out there, and they have the potential to become a wildfire again, if we give them the chance," she said, quoting a microbiologist.

Her government loosened its lockdown, which had shuttered schools and most businesses. Surfers hit the waves at dawn Tuesday, builders returned to construction sites and baristas fired up espresso machines.



Surfers walk onto the sand to prepare to enter the water at Bondi Beach in Sydney, Tuesday, April 28, 2020, as coronavirus pandemic restrictions are eased. The beach is open to swimmers and surfers to exercise only. (AP Photo/Rick Rycroft)



People wearing protective face masks to help curb the spread of the new coronavirus walk by human sculptures on display outside an art gallery in Beijing, Tuesday, April 28, 2020. The Chinese city of Wuhan that was the original epicenter of the pandemic again reported no new coronavirus cases or deaths Tuesday and its hospitals remained empty of virus patients for a second straight day. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



Exile Tibetan Buddhist nuns stand apart as they wait in a queue to receive free ration distributed by a Tibetan Buddhist monk during lockdown to curb the spread of new coronavirus in Dharmasala, India, Tuesday, April 28, 2020. (AP Photo/Ashwini Bhatia)



Inmates gather around the corpses of other inmates during a prison riot in Miguel Castro Castro prison, in Lima, Peru, Monday, April 27, 2020. Peru's prison agency reported that three prisoners died from causes still under investigation after a riot at the prison. Inmates complain authorities are not doing enough to prevent the spread of coronavirus inside the prison. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)



Louisa Boyer, a provisional election judge, reviews paperwork at a voting center at Edmondson High School as voters arrive to cast their ballot in the 7th Congressional District special election, Tuesday, April 28, 2020, in Baltimore. The election to fill a seat left open by the death last October of Congressman Elijah Cummings has been dramatically reshaped by the coronavirus outbreak. (AP Photo/Julio Cortez)



A man with a face mask against the spread of the new coronavirus walks in front of Miraitowa and Someity, mascots for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Paralympics at a park in Tokyo Tuesday, April 28, 2020. Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe expanded a state of emergency to all of Japan from just Tokyo and other urban areas as the virus continues to spread. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)



Medical staff of the Polizu maternity hospital listen to a violinist playing to entertain them and the patients in Bucharest, Romania, Tuesday, April 28, 2020. Raluca Raducanu, a young violinist, played a mix of rock and classical pieces during an under one hour performance outside the hospital. (AP Photo/Andreea Alexandru)



A man wearing a mask sits next the coffin of his mother as he's transported by a cemetery worker in a full protection suit to her burial site at the Nossa Senhora das Gracas cemetery in Duque de Caxias, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Monday, April 27, 2020. The woman's body was previously being held in a refrigerator for confirmed and suspected victims of of COVID-19, according to the administration of the cemetery. (AP Photo/Silvia Izquierdo)



Clerks wear face masks to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus as they wait for customers at the entrance to a restaurant in Beijing, Tuesday, April 28, 2020. The Chinese city of Wuhan, which was the original epicenter of the pandemic, again reported no new coronavirus cases or deaths Tuesday and its hospitals remained empty of virus patients for a second straight day. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)



A worker at the ECCA laboratories hangs mouth masks in the Clean Mask Decontaminating Room in Merelbeke, Belgium, Tuesday, April 28, 2020. The converted shipping container holds 1500 masks and runs on a six hour disinfection cycle with a hydrogen peroxide dry mist. With mouth masks in short supply for healthcare workers in Belgium against coronavirus (COVID-19), innovative solutions have been made to deal with the crisis. (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo)

In Australia, hundreds returned to the water after Sydney's iconic Bondi Beach reopened to swimmers and surfers. Still, people can only use the beach during daylight, cannot linger and are limited to ensure social distancing. Australia has reported only 83 virus deaths, less than the tolls reported by over 25 U.S. states.

But the virus is still a long-term foe. The president of the Japan Medical Association, Yoshitake Yokokura, said he thinks it will be difficult to hold the rescheduled Tokyo Summer Olympics even in 2021 without an effective coronavirus vaccine.

Japan and the International Olympic Committee agreed to postpone the Tokyo 2020 Games until July 2021 due to the pandemic. Japan is under a monthlong state of emergency amid a rapid increase of infections and medical workers say hospitals are overburdened.

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