

US bans Brazil travel over virus surge as Europe keeps easing

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The United States suspended travel from Brazil over an explosion of coronavirus infections in the South American nation, but across the Atlantic, many parts of Europe were set to further ease lockdowns on

Monday after slowing their COVID-19 outbreaks.

The pandemic's rampage across Latin America has pushed the worldwide caseload to nearly 5.4 million, with deaths approaching 350,000, but with the [global economy](#) battered, governments are scrambling to provide relief however they can to businesses and citizens wearying of mass confinement.

Brazil—the world's sixth-largest country—has been declared the latest hotspot with more than 360,000 reported cases, second only to the United States, even as its leader, the far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, plays down the threat from the virus.

In a sign of global concern about the outbreak in Brazil, where more than 22,000 have died of COVID-19, the White House said Sunday it would bar entry into the US of non-Americans who have been in the South American nation in the 14 days before.

Despite the crisis engulfing Brazil, Bolsonaro—an ally of US President Donald Trump—has repeatedly argued that lockdown measures are unnecessary and harmful to the economy.

He flouted social distancing rules again on Sunday, attending a rally outside the presidential palace in Brasilia to greet a cheering rally, ditching his [face mask](#), shaking hands and embracing supporters—even hoisting a young boy onto his shoulders at one point.

The leader grinned as flag-waving supporters shouted "Legend!" and "The people support you, Bolsonaro!"

But despite the strong support from his political base, he has faced scathing criticism for his handling of the outbreak as experts warn Brazil's healthcare system is overwhelmed.

And while his government has imposed a Brazil travel ban over the virus, President Trump remains frustrated with lockdown measures, and—with 40 million jobs lost this year—is aggressively pushing a US reopening despite the national death toll approaching 100,000.

Again trying to project confidence, Trump played golf for a second straight day on Sunday, after avoiding the fairways since March 8.

The polarized opinion on lockdowns in America was on display after video footage emerged of a jam-packed swimming pool in Missouri over the weekend, despite orders mandating social distancing measures.

"Scenes such as this one... are inconceivable during the pandemic. Do they all have death wishes?" one woman tweeted.

Another countered: "Just Americans being free and making their own decisions and enjoying life."

More easing in Europe

In Europe, with infection numbers stabilizing, governments continued towards lighter social distancing measures with more easing expected on Monday, but they remain keen to avoid a second wave of cases that could further devastate the hard-hit continent.

Restaurants, bars and swimming pools are among several types of businesses set to reopen Monday in the Czech Republic, which has reported nearly 9,000 cases.

The nation will even allow events with up to 300 people, and Czechs are no longer obliged to wear face masks in public except in shops and on [public transport](#).

Elsewhere in Europe, cafes and restaurants in Greece were gearing up to reopen on Monday—but only those with outdoor service, while Spain will continue easing the lockdown in Madrid and Barcelona.

Meanwhile, nightclubs and bars are set to resume business in Iceland's capital Reykjavik, zoos and museums will reopen in Copenhagen, while Rome's swimming pools and sports centers will also reopen.

In Germany, where infection control measures are now largely up to its 16 federal states, public debate and criticism was triggered by Bodo Ramelow, premier of tiny central Thuringia, when he announced that statewide rules—for example on mask-wearing or safe distances—would all be eliminated by June 6.

Mounting political pressure

The unprecedented crisis has in many cases worsened already fractured international ties and fuelled domestic political polarization.

Virus-fuelled tensions have pushed Beijing and Washington to the "bring of a new Cold War", Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi warned Sunday, after Trump accused his government of a lack of transparency, and even pushed the theory that the [coronavirus](#) may have leaked from a Chinese laboratory.

Most scientists believe the pandemic originated when the virus jumped from animals to humans, likely in a market in the central Chinese city of Wuhan last year, while Beijing has furiously denied the lab theory.

And in Britain, Prime Minister Boris Johnson was on Sunday forced to defend his top aide Dominic Cummings, who has been accused of having breached the government's own lockdown rules.

Cummings was seen visiting his parents in Durham, 250 miles (400 kilometers) from his London home in March, despite suffering from virus symptoms.

The Observer and Sunday Mirror reported he had broken lockdown restrictions again in April.

"He has acted responsibly and legally and with integrity," Johnson said of Cummings.

But Tory MP Craig Whittaker tweeted: "You cannot advise the nation one thing then do the opposite."

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