

China, S. Korea see new virus cases as world lockdowns ease

May 8 2020, by Kim Tong-Hyung and Elaine Kurtenbach



Military soldiers wearing face masks line up to buy train tickets as they are allowed to go on leave after more than two months of restrictions during heightened concerns of the coronavirus pandemic at the Seoul Railway Station in Seoul, South Korea, Friday, May 8, 2020. South Korean officials sounded alarms Friday after finding more than a dozen coronavirus infections linked to club goers in the densely populated Seoul metropolitan area. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)

China and South Korea both reported more coronavirus infections Friday after reopening economies damaged by devastating outbreaks. Around the globe, governments are opting to accept the risks of easing pandemic-fighting restrictions that left huge numbers of people without income or safety nets.

In the U.S., some governors are disregarding or creatively interpreting White House guidelines in easing their states' lockdowns and letting businesses reopen. An Associated Press analysis found 17 states appeared to have not met one of the key benchmarks set by the White House for loosening up—a 14-day downward trajectory in new cases or positive test rates.

Worries over future waves of infections reflect the difficulty of fighting a disease that leaves many of those infected with scant or no symptoms, even as thousands lose their lives to pneumonia and other virus-related illness.

South Korea's 13 fresh cases reported Friday were its first increase higher than 10 in five days. A dozen were linked to a 29-year-old who visited three nightclubs in Seoul last weekend.

"A drop of ink in clear water spreads swiftly," Vice Health Minister Kim Gang-lip said, urging vigilance to guard hard-won gains. "Anyone can become that drop of ink that spreads COVID-19."

After its caseload waned from hundreds a day to a handful daily in recent weeks, South Korea has relaxed social distancing guidelines, scheduled school reopenings and allowed professional sports to resume without fans in the stands.



A man wearing a face mask to protect against the spread of the new coronavirus cycles through China Town in Yokohama, near Tokyo, Friday, May 8, 2020. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced that Japan extend a state of emergency until end of May. (AP Photo/Koji Sasahara)

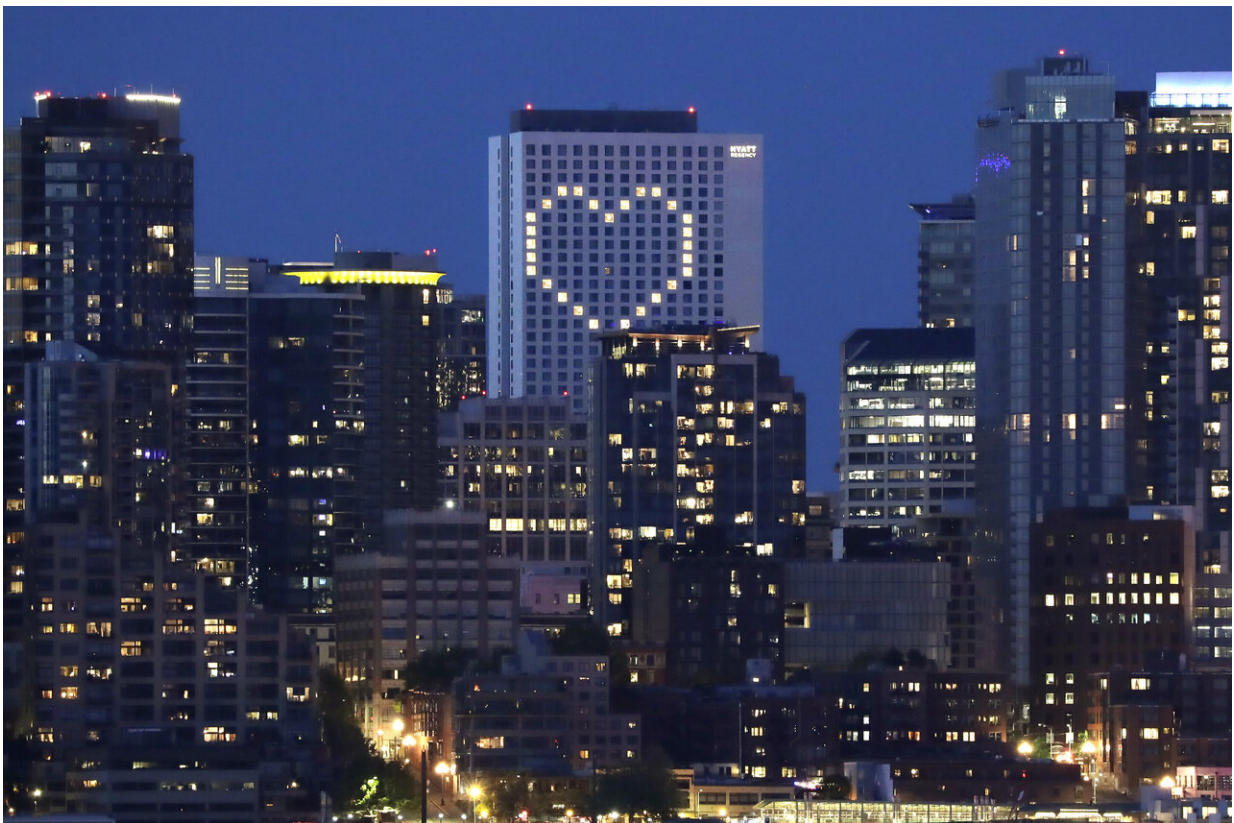
In China, where the new coronavirus first emerged, authorities reported 17 new virus cases on Friday, including 16 that tested positive but were not showing symptoms. No new deaths have been reported for more than three weeks, and just 260 people remain hospitalized to be treated for COVID-19.

The dire stakes of the pandemic have contributed to a surge in anti-foreigner sentiment including denying medical treatment to migrants and refugees, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said. He appealed

for an end to the "tsunami of hate and xenophobia, scapegoating and scare-mongering."

The U.N. is urging governments, companies and billionaires to contribute to a \$6.7 billion appeal to fight the [coronavirus](#) in poor countries, warning that failure to help could cause a "hunger pandemic," famine, riots and conflict.

Worldwide, the virus has infected more than 3.8 million people and killed over 268,000, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University based on official data. More than 1.2 million Americans have been infected and 75,000 have died. But everywhere, limited testing, differences in counting the dead and concealment by some governments undoubtedly mean the true scale of the pandemic is much greater.



A giant heart created by windows lit by the building's engineering team is illuminated in the Hyatt Regency hotel as a way to lift the spirits of the community in the midst of the coronavirus outbreak, Thursday, May 7, 2020, in Seattle. The heart-shaped lighting began on the building in late March and has continued since. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)

This week, University of Washington researchers nearly doubled their projection of deaths in the U.S. to about 134,000 through early August, largely because the loosening of stay-at-home restrictions will mean the virus spreads to more people.

An Associated Press analysis found many states that have begun to ease shutdowns or are about to do so have not yet attained a steady decline in cases and deaths. They include Alabama, Kentucky, Maine, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Utah.

The AP analyzed counts of tests and confirmed cases compiled by Johns Hopkins and looked at the numbers using a rolling seven-day average to account for day-to-day variability in test reporting.

The broad wording of the nonbinding guidelines means other states, including Georgia, have technically managed to meet the criteria and reopen.



Crew members of Air India arrive at Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport for a repatriation flight to bring back Indians from London, in Mumbai, India, Friday, May 8, 2020. (AP Photo/Rajanish Kakade)

In Nebraska, new cases and positivity rates have risen recently, but Gov. Pete Ricketts, a Republican, has eased rules to allow salons, tattoo parlors, restaurants and churches to reopen with restrictions in most counties.

"We could ban just about all deaths on the interstate by reducing the speed to 5 mph, but we don't do that," Ricketts said, noting that the number of new cases would naturally increase as testing ramps up.

Of the 33 states that have had a 14-day downward trajectory of either

cases or positive test rates, 25 are partially opened or moving to reopen within days, the AP analysis found.

California, the most populous state and the first to impose a comprehensive lockdown, is letting retailers and manufacturers reopen with safety measures as soon as Friday. The state has met at least one of the federal benchmarks, according to the AP analysis.



A woman sitting on a stoop reading a book in the sun is seen reflected by a closed clothing store's window on West Broadway, Thursday, May 7, 2020, in the SoHo neighborhood of the Manhattan borough in New York. The U.S. government is poised to report the worst set of job numbers since record-keeping began in 1948, a stunning snapshot of the toll the coronavirus has taken on a now-shattered economy. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)



Workers wait outside a diner for their food, Thursday, May 7, 2020, in Kansas City, Mo. The city remains under stay-at-home orders until May 15 in an effort to stem the spread of the new coronavirus. (AP Photo/Charlie Riedel)

As governments grapple with when to restart their economies, the Trump administration shelved a 17-page Centers for Disease Control and Prevention document with step-by-step advice to help local authorities do it safely.

Adding to pressure to ease restrictions are the hundreds of businesses collapsing by the day. Over 33 million Americans have applied for unemployment benefits over the past seven weeks, and a highly anticipated report on Friday is expected to show U.S. joblessness as high

as 16%, a level not seen since the Great Depression nearly a century ago.

Public health experts say the guidance from the White House has been anything but clear, while pushing responsibility for expanding testing onto the states.

It's like "an orchestra without a conductor," said Lawrence Gostin, a public health expert at Georgetown University. States share some blame, he said, but "the responsibility for coordinating and enforcing and implementing a national plan comes from the White House."

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