

Europe steps up reopening, unveils plans for summer travel

May 13 2020



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Europe moved ahead with its emergence from coronavirus lockdown on Wednesday and laid out plans for summer tourism, but the pandemic gathered pace elsewhere.

Britain followed France, Italy and Spain in easing its lockdown but only in England, where people were given more freedom to leave their homes and return to their jobs if they cannot work remotely.

Austria said its borders with Germany would reopen from mid-June and Berlin said it aimed to end virus checks at its land borders in about a month.

Desperate to save millions of tourism jobs, the European Union set out plans for a phased restart of travel this summer, with EU border controls eventually lifted and measures to minimise the risks of infection, like wearing face masks on shared transport.

"Today's guidance can be the chance of a better season for the many Europeans whose livelihood depends on tourism and, of course, for those who would like to travel this summer," EU Commission executive vice president Margrethe Vestager told reporters.

In a sign that France might be ready for summer holidays, some beaches reopened on Wednesday—but only for swimming and fishing, while sunbathing remained prohibited.

Second wave fears

But with the global death toll from the coronavirus exceeding 292,000, the picture was grim in other parts of the world.

Chile imposed a total lockdown in its capital Santiago after a 60 percent surge in cases over the past 24 hours.

The capital has been by far the hardest hit and the country has until now imposed selective quarantine measures.

Russia, now the country with the second-highest number of virus cases, recorded more than 10,000 new infections after authorities this week eased restrictions to allow some people back to work.

Brazil registered its highest virus death toll in a single day, with 881 new fatalities bringing the total to 12,400, and the country was emerging as a new global hotspot despite President Jair Bolsonaro dismissing the pandemic as a "little flu".

And fears were growing of a second wave of infections in China, with the northeastern city of Jilin put in partial lockdown and Wuhan, where the virus was first reported last year, planning to test its entire population after clusters of new cases.

'Risk of uncontrollable outbreak'

The United States, which has confirmed more than 1.36 million cases, saw a sharp rise in fatalities, with 1,894 new deaths reported on Tuesday after daily tolls fell below 1,000.

The country's top infectious diseases expert Anthony Fauci issued a stark warning about the dangers of resuming normal life too soon, saying a run of 14 days with falling cases was a vital first step.

"If a community or a state or region doesn't go by those guidelines and reopens... the consequences could be really serious," he said Tuesday.

"There is a real risk that you will trigger an outbreak that you may not be able to control."

Fauci said the true number killed by the epidemic in the US is likely greater than the official toll of over 82,000—the world's highest.

Facing a re-election campaign later this year, President Donald Trump is pressing for rapid steps to get the US economy moving again, despite warnings from health officials.

Washington has increasingly blamed China for the global outbreak and on Wednesday authorities warned healthcare and scientific researchers that Chinese-backed hackers were attempting to steal research and intellectual property related to treatments and vaccines for the coronavirus.

"China's efforts to target these sectors pose a significant threat to our nation's response to COVID-19," a statement from the FBI and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency said.

Moves to reboot economies

Countries around the world are grappling with how to reopen businesses after the pandemic forced half of the planet into some form of lockdown and ground the global economy to a near-halt.

Dire economic data from March and April have pointed to the worst downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s after millions of people were thrown out of work.

Figures from Britain on Wednesday showed its economy shrinking by two percent in January-March, its fastest slump since 2008 and with a far worse contraction to come.

The Bank of England last week warned that the economic paralysis could lead to Britain's worst recession in centuries, with output forecast to crash 14 percent this year.

Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said shutdowns in the United

States would do "lasting damage" but "the economy should substantially recover once the virus is under control".

He said crisis measures, including spending beyond the nearly \$3 trillion already approved in the United States, would be crucial to ensuring a strong recovery.

Health experts have warned of the potentially devastating consequences as the virus spreads through the developing world, where healthcare systems are under-funded and isolation regimes are often not possible.

'Tough old lady'

In northern Nigeria, surging death tolls have sparked fears that the virus is spreading, with a team of government investigators saying hundreds of deaths were suspected to be linked to the pandemic.

Making the problem worse, hospitals have shut their doors to the sick out of fears over the virus—meaning treatment for a raft of ailments has stopped.

Civil servant Binta Mohammed said she had to watch her husband die from "diabetic complications" after he was turned away for treatment.

"The four private hospitals we took him to refused to admit him for fear he had the virus," she said.

But there were stories of hope amid the gloom, including two centenarians who survived the virus.

In Spain, 113-year-old Maria Branyas fought off the illness during weeks of isolation at a retirement home where several other residents died from the disease.

And in Russia, 100-year-old Pelageya Poyarkova was discharged from a Moscow hospital after having recovered.

Russian television showed Poyarkova wearing a face mask and clutching a bouquet of red roses as she exited in a wheelchair, surrounded by doctors and journalists.

"She turned out to be a tough old lady," the hospital's acting director Vsevolod Belousov said.

© 2020 AFP

Citation: Europe steps up reopening, unveils plans for summer travel (2020, May 13) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-05-europe-reopening-unveils-summer.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.