

Europe relaxing virus restrictions but cases flare elsewhere

May 15 2020, by David Rising, Elaine Kurtenbach and David Biller



From left, Tejmur, Naile, Layla and Emil Hacimuradov from Neuwied enjoy to feed sparrows as they have breakfast in a bakery at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, Germany, Friday, May 15, 2020. After month of a nationwide lockdown restaurants are reopening in more German states on Friday. (AP Photo/Michael Sohn)

Germany and several other European countries where the coronavirus spread has slowed were moving ahead Friday with relaxing border restrictions, while flare-ups in Mexico and elsewhere served as a reminder the pandemic is far from over.

Slovenia, which has been gradually easing strict lockdown measures, declared that the spread of the virus is now under control and that European Union residents could now enter from Austria, Italy and Hungary.

Germany, meantime, was preparing to open its border entirely with Luxembourg at midnight, and increase the number of crossings open from France, Switzerland and Austria. Travelers will still need to demonstrate a "valid reason" to enter Germany and there will be spot checks, but the goal is to restore free travel by June 15.

Germany's states have also agreed to drop a mandatory 14-day quarantine for travelers entering from the European Union and several other European countries, including Britain, said Armin Laschet, the governor of the western state of North Rhine-Westphalia.

"Germany will only overcome the corona crisis if European freedom of movement for people, goods and services is fully restored," Laschet said.

Germany has seen more than 170,000 COVID-19 infections and nearly 8,000 deaths, but more than 150,000 people have recovered and the country has been seeing fewer than 1,000 new cases per day.



A waitress with a protective mask serves a guest a coffee at cafe 'Sperl' in Vienna, Austria, Friday, May 15, 2020. In Austria gastronomy may open again under certain conditions from Friday on. The Austrian government has moved to restrict freedom of movement for people, in an effort to slow the onset of the COVID-19 coronavirus. (AP Photo/Ronald Zak)

In northern Europe, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania removed travel restrictions between the Baltic nations, which Estonian Prime Minister Juri Ratas called "another step toward normal life."

Austria and Switzerland were also moving ahead with easing some border restrictions, and Austria reopened all cafes and restaurants.

"I have been having breakfast at this café for about 100 years," said

Helmut Gollner, a former literature professor who was one of the first guests Friday morning at Vienna's Cafe Sperl. "My wife always made great breakfast but it's a different atmosphere here with the newspapers and so on."

Restaurants were reopening in more German states Friday as well, and the country was to resume professional soccer on Saturday after a two-month hiatus.

The Bundesliga plans five games with no fans present and other precautions, including the Ruhr derby between Borussia Dortmund and Schalke.



Waitresses with a protective mask serves guests at cafe 'Sperl' in Vienna, Austria, Friday, May 15, 2020. In Austria gastronomy may open again under

certain conditions from Friday on. The Austrian government has moved to restrict freedom of movement for people, in an effort to slow the onset of the COVID-19 coronavirus. (AP Photo/Ronald Zak)

In Sydney, many cafes and restaurants opened again Friday as New South Wales, Australia's most populous state, granted permission for them, as well as places of worship, to reopen with up to 10 people so long as distancing rules are in place.

Many Catholic churches across the state opened for private prayer, confession and small-scale Masses.

"The celebration of Mass is the highest form of Catholic worship and to not be able to physically gather these past two months has been very difficult," Sydney's Archbishop Anthony Fisher said in a statement.

In Japan, some schools, restaurants and other businesses started to reopen after the country lifted its national coronavirus emergency, while keeping in place restrictions in limited urban areas like Tokyo where risks remain.

As countries move ahead with relaxing restrictions, the head of the World Health Organization's Europe office, Dr. Hans Kluge, warned that distancing guidance and other protective measures were more important than ever.



In this April 15, 2020, file photo, a health worker from an aid organization walks wearing a hazmat suit at the Kutupalong Rohingya refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Authorities on Thursday, May 14, 2020 reported the first coronavirus case in the crowded camps for Rohingya refugees in southern Bangladesh, where more than 1 million refugees have been sheltered, a Bangladeshi official and the United Nations said. (AP Photo/Shafiqur Rahman, File)

"It's very important to remind everyone that as long as there is no vaccine and effective treatment, there is no return to normal," he said on French radio Europe-1.

"This virus won't simply disappear, so the personal behavior of each of us will determine the behavior of the virus. Governments have done a

lot, and now the responsibility is on the people."

Worldwide, there have been more than 4.4 million coronavirus infections reported and 300,000 deaths, while nearly 1.6 million people have recovered according to a tally kept by Johns Hopkins University.

A first case was confirmed among the 1 million refugees from Myanmar living in dire, overcrowded conditions in southern Bangladesh. Another, a local person living in the Cox's Bazaar district, also tested positive, refugee commissioner Mahbub Alam Takukder said.



In this April 12, 2020, file photo, Rohingya refugees walk through one of the arterial roads at the Kutupalong refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Authorities on Thursday, May 14, 2020 reported the first coronavirus case in the crowded camps for Rohingya refugees in southern Bangladesh, where more than

1 million refugees have been sheltered, a Bangladeshi official and the United Nations said. (AP Photo/Shafiqur Rahman, File)

Aid workers have been warning of the potential for a serious outbreak if the virus reaches the camps, and teams were activated to treat patients and trace, quarantine and test people they may have encountered.

Somalia's official death toll hit 53, but aid groups and authorities say that figure could be far too low in a country with one of the world's weakest health systems, after three decades of civil war.

Ahead of Mexico's plan to partially reopen key industries such as mining, construction and auto plants on May 18, authorities sounded a note of concern as the country reported its largest one-day rise in coronavirus case numbers.

There were 2,409 new COVID-19 test confirmations Thursday, the first time that number has exceeded 2,000 in one day.

"We are at the moment of the fastest growth in new cases," said Assistant Health Secretary Hugo López-Gatell. "This is the most difficult moment."



Harris County Sheriff's Deputy Darryl Peaks rehearses with honor guard members outside at Humble First Assembly of God during the funeral service for Sgt. Raymond Scholwinski Thursday, May 14, 2020, in Humble, Texas. Sgt. Scholwinski died last week after contracting COVID-19. (AP Photo/David J. Phillip)

Deaths have neared 4,500 and there were signs that hospital capacity was nearing its limit in Mexico City, the hardest-hit area. The Health Department reported that 73% percent of the city's general-care hospital beds were full; the percentage was lower for intensive-care beds, but that was partly because of the expansion of improvised ICU units at hospitals and other venues.

In Brazil, news website G1 reported that 900 people in Rio de Janeiro

were waiting for an intensive-care bed in one of the state's overwhelmed units. President Jair Bolsonaro warned of looming "chaos" as he once again lambasted governors and mayors who introduced lockdowns in cities to limit spread of the new virus.

"I'm sorry, many will die, but even more will if the economy continues to be destroyed by these measures," Bolsonaro told journalists in Brasilia on Thursday. "These lockdowns, closing everything, is the path to failure. It will break Brazil."



Mariachi musicians wear masks amid the new coronavirus pandemic as they play a serenade at Garibaldi square, now empty of visitors, in Mexico City, Thursday, May 14, 2020. (AP Photo/Eduardo Verdugo)



Patrons stand on line next to a fashion store, as they wait their turn to shop at Whole Foods Market in Los Angeles on Thursday, May 14, 2020. Leaving home in Los Angeles now requires bringing a face covering, part of the price for reopening more businesses and activities in America's second-largest city. Mayor Eric Garcetti said everyone must carry the coverings when they go outdoors and wear them when they are around people from outside their households. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes)



A popular dining area with several restaurants along the shoreline has no activity as stage 1 of the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions begin in Sydney, Friday, May 15, 2020. Some pubs, clubs and restaurants are reopening with a limit of 10 patrons while following distancing guidelines. (AP Photo/Rick Rycroft)



Rob Barton, right, and Charlie Downe have lunch at a restaurant along the shoreline as stage 1 of the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions begin in Sydney, Friday, May 15, 2020. Some pubs, clubs and restaurants are reopening with a limit of 10 patrons while following distancing guidelines. (AP Photo/Rick Rycroft)



Doctors and nurses chant slogans during a protest outside 2 de Mayo hospital in Lima, Peru, Thursday, May 14, 2020. Doctors and nurses are demanding better salaries and the purchase of more personal protection equipment amidst the new coronavirus pandemic. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)



Elderly residents listen to music as soldiers in full protection gear against COVID-19, arrive to disinfect the Complex Stella Maris shelter for the elderly in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Thursday, May 14, 2020. Soldiers disinfected the shelter in an attempt to control the spread of the new coronavirus among the elderly who are part of the group considered more vulnerable or at risk of being infected. (AP Photo/Silvia Izquierdo)



Tables and chairs stand in an empty terrace bar in Madrid, Spain, Friday, May 15, 2020. Deaths in Spain attributed to the new coronavirus have fallen again after a small spike and authorities are keeping a close eye on the numbers to see whether an ongoing easing of restrictions on movement triggers a surge in cases. (AP Photo/Paul White)

Colombian President Ivan Duque has ordered all residents of the Amazonas Department, near the border with Brazil, to stay inside except to buy food or get medical care. Local hospitals are being overwhelmed as cases rise in a vulnerable part of the Amazon, home to many indigenous groups.

In the U.S., the Grand Canyon National Park was reopening Friday to allow visitors in for day trips but not overnight.

As a number of regions in New York were to reopen, Gov. Andrew Cuomo urged local governments to keep a close eye on key metrics, and that people and businesses were complying with distancing rules.

Amid those and other reopenings, protests and debate persisted over how quickly to end shutdowns.

With more than 1.4 million infections and more than 85,000 deaths, the U.S. has the largest outbreak in the world by far.

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