

May brings reopenings around the globe as virus toll climbs

May 1 2020, by David Crary, Christopher Rugaber and Elaine Kurtenbach



Visitors wearing face masks to protect against the new coronavirus stand widely spaced in line as they wait to enter the Forbidden City in Beijing, Friday, May 1, 2020. The Forbidden City reopened beginning on Friday, China's May Day holiday, to limited visitors after being closed to the public for more than three months during the coronavirus outbreak. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)

May is bringing cautious reopenings from coronavirus lockdowns, from Beijing's Forbidden city to shopping malls in Texas, as the grim toll from the pandemic ticks higher.

Many communities are inching toward normalcy without certainty over whether they've vanquished outbreaks of the virus. But bleak new figures released Thursday underscored the pain inflicted by the disease and added to pressure on leaders to end shutdowns.

The number of Americans filing for [unemployment benefits](#) surpassed a staggering 30 million and the European economy shrank a record 3.8% in the first quarter as hotels, restaurants, construction sites and manufacturing were frozen by lockdowns.

As bad as those and other numbers are, some are outdated because of the lag in gathering data so the true situation is almost certainly much worse.

Still, analysts saw hope in the way new unemployment claims have fallen for four straight weeks. Andrew Stettner, a senior fellow at the Century Foundation, said the wave of layoffs at vulnerable businesses such as restaurants, hotels and stores may have largely run its course.

"Thankfully, for now, the economic contagion seems to have plateaued," Stettner said. "But we're still at a level that is a mortal threat to the nation's financial well-being."



Chinese paramilitary police and security officers wear face masks to protect against the spread of the new coronavirus as they stand guard outside an entrance to the Forbidden City in Beijing, Friday, May 1, 2020. The Forbidden City reopened beginning on Friday, China's May Day holiday, to limited visitors after being closed to the public for more than three months during the coronavirus outbreak. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)

Layoffs amount to 1 in 6 American workers and encompass more people than the entire population of Texas. Some economists say the U.S. unemployment rate for April may be as high as 20%—a figure not seen since the Depression of the 1930s, when joblessness peaked at 25%.

China's ancient, majestic Forbidden City reopened on Friday with all tickets for the May 1-5 holiday sold out, and a limit of 5,000 visitors a

day, down from the earlier maximum of 80,000. The Chinese capital reopened its parks and museums, with controlled entries, about three months after hundreds of millions of people were ordered into a near lockdown as the coronavirus outbreak erupted in the central city of Wuhan.

China on Friday reported 12 new cases, six of them brought from overseas, and no new deaths for the 16th day. Beijing on Thursday downgraded its level of emergency response to the virus, but temperature checks and social distancing remain in force.



In this Tuesday, April 28, 2020, photo, Pornsupha Hattayong gives haircuts to a medical worker treating COVID-19 patients at Bangkok Metropolitan Administration General Hospital in Bangkok, Thailand. The 43-year-old hairstylist is boosting the morale of frontline medical workers by dispensing free

haircuts at Bangkok hospitals since Thailand's hair salons have been closed for more than a month, to help stop the spread of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)

In the U.S., where large numbers of people are still dying from COVID-19, [health officials](#) are warning of the danger of a second wave of infection, and some employers and employees have expressed fear of going back to work.

Lacey Ward, an Omaha hairstylist, said she is worried that the Nebraska governor's decision to let salons reopen on May 4 could put her and her family at risk. She would prefer to collect unemployment until the danger subsides.

"I feel like we are literally the guinea pigs in this situation," she said.

Finding enough workers willing to return is proving to be a challenge for Jennifer Holliday, manager at a restaurant in Oklahoma City that will reopen its dining room Friday. Many of her employees are not returning calls or messages.

"There are some who want to just ride it out and take the unemployment," she said.



Felix Mendez tries to get his kite to take flight at a park in San Antonio, Thursday, April 30, 2020. San Antonio has extended stay-at-home orders through May 19 due to the new coronavirus pandemic and maintains the requirement of wearing a face mask or other face covering when near others. (AP Photo/Eric Gay)

In some states, authorities are more cautious: California Gov. Gavin Newsom ordered beaches in Orange County closed until further notice after tens of thousands of people flocked to the sand last weekend.

Still, many states and countries are pressing ahead, relaxing stay-at-home restrictions amid impatience among those who complain of lost livelihoods and say their rights are being trampled.

Beginning Friday, Louisiana restaurants except in hard-hit New Orleans are allowed to add outdoor tables, without wait staff, in a tiny step toward normalcy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I know people want to get out of the house now, after being cooped up. It'll be a safe way to do it. I hope. And it's still scary to a lot of people. So I'm not sure," said Mandy Perrilloux, a manager at the Trey Yuen Chinese restaurant in Mandeville, which moved a few tables to its koi pond and a waterfall garden.



Doctors attend a patient inside the intensive care unit for people infected with the new coronavirus, in a public hospital in Lima, Peru, Thursday, April 30, 2020. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)

Simon Property Group Inc., the biggest U.S. mall operator, plans to open 49 shopping centers Friday across 10 states, including Texas, Indiana and Georgia. Workers will wear masks and the numbers of

shoppers will be limited. Some stores may just partially open at first or just have curbside pickup.

The Texas coronavirus death toll hit a single-day high of 50 Thursday as the state was preparing for a slow reboot by reopening retailers, restaurants, malls and movie theaters to limited numbers of customers. The 119 killed over the past three days marks the state's deadliest stretch.

Outside the U.S., shutdowns are winding down, with caution.

Malaysia will allow most business activities to resume Monday, while a ban on mass gatherings will remain, keeping schools and worship houses shut. Thailand was preparing to reopen parks and some retailers, hair salons and restaurants, while keeping a nighttime curfew and a ban on alcohol sales.



In this April 6, 2020, file photo, protesters stop momentarily at a McDonald's drive-thru, as they join fast-food workers protesting for a second day outside the restaurant in the Crenshaw district of Los Angeles. Essential workers will strike nationwide on May Day to demand safer conditions during the coronavirus outbreak, while other groups plan rallies against tight stay-at-home orders they say are crippling the U.S. economy. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes, File)

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who recently recovered from COVID-19, said the U.K. is "past the peak" and "on a downward slope" in its outbreak but was expected to extend precautions, while Germany, Portugal and the Czech Republic were set to start loosening their restrictions.

In Australia, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the government wants more residents to download a COVIDSafe app to help track cases before its measures are eased.

"The coronavirus is still out there," he said. The app is needed to trace contacts and isolate people infected by the virus, and "We need that tool so we can open up the economy and that's why it's so important."

With signs that the outbreak has stabilized in places, and after news that the economy shrank at a 4.8% annual rate in the first three months of the year with a crushing 40% drop projected for this quarter, President Donald Trump chose not to extend the White House's social-distancing guidelines past their expiration Thursday. Those guidelines encouraged people to work from home and avoid restaurants, groups and nonessential travel.



In this March 30, 2020, file photo, workers at an Amazon fulfillment center in the Staten Island borough of New York protest conditions in the company's warehouse. Essential workers will strike nationwide on May Day to demand safer conditions during the coronavirus outbreak, while other groups plan rallies against tight stay-at-home orders they say are crippling the U.S. economy. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews, File)



A woman wears a face mask as she walks on Pier 45 in Hudson River Park, Thursday night, April 30, 2020, in New York. As the new coronavirus pandemic upends lives across the United States, it is taking a widespread toll on people's mental health and stress levels, according to a survey that finds a majority of Americans felt nervous, depressed, lonely or hopeless in the past week. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)



A boy wears a face mask as he bicycles on Pier 45 in Hudson River Park, Thursday evening, April 30, 2020, in New York. As the new coronavirus pandemic upends lives across the United States, it is taking a widespread toll on people's mental health and stress levels, according to a survey that finds a majority of Americans felt nervous, depressed, lonely or hopeless in the past week. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)



A worker wearing a face mask to protect against the new coronavirus sweeps along a passageway in the Forbidden City in Beijing, Friday, May 1, 2020. The Forbidden City reopened beginning on Friday, China's May Day holiday, to limited visitors after being closed to the public for more than three months during the coronavirus outbreak. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)



Melina Vargas, who works in the cleaning team inside the intensive care unit for people infected with the new coronavirus, prepares to go to work after having lunch, in a public hospital in Lima, Peru, Thursday, April 30, 2020. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)



A visitor wearing a face mask to protect against the new coronavirus walks through the Forbidden City in Beijing, Friday, May 1, 2020. The Forbidden City reopened beginning on Friday, China's May Day holiday, to limited visitors after being closed to the public for more than three months during the coronavirus outbreak. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)



Visitors wearing face masks to protect against the new coronavirus walk through the Forbidden City in Beijing, Friday, May 1, 2020. The Forbidden City reopened beginning on Friday, China's May Day holiday, to limited visitors after being closed to the public for more than three months during the coronavirus outbreak. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)



Visitors wearing face masks to protect against the new coronavirus walk through the Forbidden City in Beijing, Friday, May 1, 2020. The Forbidden City reopened beginning on Friday, China's May Day holiday, to limited visitors after being closed to the public for more than three months during the coronavirus outbreak. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)

Trump continued to speculate on the origins of the [coronavirus](#), saying that China could have unleashed it on the world due to some kind of horrible "mistake" or that it might have been released intentionally. Intelligence agencies said they are still examining a notion put forward by the president and aides that the pandemic may have resulted from an accident at a Chinese lab.

The virus has killed over 230,000 people worldwide, including more

than 61,000 in the U.S., according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. Confirmed infections globally topped 3.2 million, with 1 million of them in the U.S., but the true numbers are believed to be much higher because of limited testing, differences in counting the dead and concealment by some governments.

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