

# **Virus tolls surge in Americas as Europe re-opens**

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This transmission electron microscope image shows SARS-CoV-2 -- also known as 2019-nCoV, the virus that causes COVID-19 -- isolated from a patient in the US. Virus particles are shown emerging from the surface of cells cultured in the

lab. The spikes on the outer edge of the virus particles give coronaviruses their name, crown-like. Credit: NIAID-RML

The death toll from the coronavirus spiked again in the United States, and Latin America's pandemic crisis deepened, as Europe's re-opening from lockdown grew bolder by the day.

Grim figures from the Americas were accompanied by the growing economic fallout, with the number of people filing unemployment claims in the US reaching 40 million, and Brazil shedding five million jobs.

But Europe pressed on with efforts to return to normality, with the English Premier League and Italy's Serie A unveiling plans to resume play.

Populations are learning to adjust to life with the long-term threat of infection as the virus continues its march around the globe and a vaccine remains elusive.

Pharmaceutical firm bosses expressed optimism a jab could be rolled out by year's end but warned of "daunting" challenges in producing the 15 billion doses needed to curb the pandemic.

Well over 100 labs around the world are scrambling to come up with a vaccine, including 10 candidates that have made it to the clinical trial stage.

"If things go well, and the stars are aligned, we will have enough evidence of safety and efficacy so that we can... have a vaccine around the end of October," said Pfizer boss Albert Bourla.

## 'Everything has changed'

The urgency was underlined by ballooning death tolls in South America, increasingly the new focus of the pandemic, where Brazil recorded more than 1,000 fatalities and a national one-day record for infections.

Chile also logged a record daily [death toll](#) Thursday and in Peru total fatalities topped 4,000.

With limited sanitation and little space for social distancing, millions of people in slums across the region cannot take basic precautions recommended by [health authorities](#) and have little to fall back on when lockdowns destroy jobs.

"We are construction workers, people who sell things, people who go out every day. With confinement everything has changed for most of us. We find ourselves without any work," Oscar Gonzalez, a 43-year-old welder in the deprived Brisas del Sol area of Santiago, told AFP.

The economic toll on workers around the world was illustrated further with news that French car giant Renault plans to cut 15,000 jobs as part of a two billion euro cost-cutting drive.

British budget airline EasyJet also said it would axe up to 30 percent of its staff, and Japanese carmaker Nissan reported a huge \$6.2 billion annual net loss.

Seeking to stem the bleeding, Europe has been carefully moving ahead with the lifting of restrictions on daily life, with France set to reopen bars, restaurants and museums next week and Britain sending children back to school over the next two weeks.

"Freedom will be the rule and restrictions the exception," French Prime

Minister Edouard Philippe said.

Elsewhere in Europe, Spaniards were revisiting old joys as life gets back on track—with people seen belting out tunes from classic movie "Grease" at a 1950s-themed drive-in theatre in Madrid.

"It gives you a real sense of freedom. We really wanted to get out of the house," said 22-year-old Belen Perez.

Spain will allow 70 percent of the population to go to restaurants, swimming pools and shopping centres from next week.

Globally the death toll is nearing 360,000 and almost 5.8 million people have been confirmed as infected since the virus emerged in China late last year.

## **Curbs return**

But many countries that have seen success in curbing the virus since early outbreaks are now on alert for a second wave of infections, with South Korea and Sri Lanka showing renewed signs of caution.

South Korea—held up as a global model in how to stop the virus—has reimposed some social distancing rules after a series of new clusters emerged, many in the capital Seoul.

Museums, parks and art galleries were closed again from Friday for two weeks and companies urged to reintroduce flexible working practices. The numbers of children in Seoul schools will also be cut back.

And in Sri Lanka, some lockdown rules will be rolled out again from Sunday after more than 250 returnees from Kuwait were found to be infected.

The United States has now seen over 101,000 deaths from the disease.

"To all of the families & friends of those who have passed, I want to extend my heartfelt sympathy & love for everything that these great people stood for & represent. God be with you!" President Donald Trump tweeted.

The US capital Washington will slowly move into its phase one of reopening on Friday as more parts of the country open up the economy, sometimes against the advice of health experts.

As people emerge from weeks of confinement, some say the experience has not been all bad.

Electronic dance music titan David Guetta said lockdown had given him the chance to look inward and breed inspiration as the 52-year-old Grammy-winning French DJ gears up for a New York COVID-19 benefit concert.

"I've tried to dig into myself," Guetta said.

"I'm more inspired to write songs to inspire people and try to give them happiness."

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