

Europe fears complacency; virus hits 'full speed' in Africa

July 9 2020, by Jovana Gec and Geir Moulson



A member of the Bangladeshi immigrant community, right, has a swab being taken to test for COVID-19 outside a healthcare center in Rome, Thursday, July 9, 2020. Italy, the onetime European epicenter of the outbreak, went on alert about possible infections in the Bangladeshi immigrant community after a cluster of about a dozen cases was traced to a recently returning Bangladeshi worker in Rome. (Mauro Scrobogna/LaPresse via AP)

Asian and European officials pleaded with their citizens Thursday to respect modest precautions as several countries saw coronavirus outbreaks accelerate or sought to prevent new flare-ups, while the virus showed no signs of slowing its initial advance in Africa and the Americas.

Following two nights of anti-lockdown protests in Serbia, authorities banned mass gatherings in the capital of Belgrade amid an uptick in confirmed COVID-19 cases. Officials elsewhere in Europe warned of the risk of new flareups due to lax social distancing, while officials in Tokyo and Hong Kong reviewed nightclubs, restaurants and other public gathering spots as a source of their latest cases.

Infections mounted at a frightening speed in the countries with the world's highest confirmed caseloads—the United States, India and Brazil. Between them, the three account for the majority of new cases worldwide reported daily.

India on Thursday reported 25,000 new cases; the United States on Wednesday reported just short of the record 60,000 cases set a day earlier, and Brazil reported nearly 45,000. In the U.S., the [total number](#) of confirmed cases has passed 3 million—meaning nearly one in every 100 people has been confirmed as infected

The head of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the continent would be wise to prepare for the worst-case scenario as virus-related deaths passed 12,000 and confirmed cases climbed fast. A day after confirmed virus cases across Africa surpassed half a million, the total was over 522,000, and the actual number of cases is unknown since testing levels are low.



A man attempts to self administer a COVID-19 test during a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) mass testing site at HEB Park, Wednesday, July, 8, 2020 in Edinburg, Texas. Hidalgo County is one of only three sites picked by the federal government for the mass testing. (Delcia Lopez/The Monitor via AP)

'We've crossed a critical number here," Africa CDC chief John Nkengasong said of the half-million milestone. "Our pandemic is getting full speed."

Much of Europe appeared to have put the worst of the crisis behind it, at least for now. But Serbia has emerged as a new focus of concern—and of unrest. On Thursday, authorities banned gatherings of more than 10 people in Belgrade, the capital, in what they said was an effort to prevent

the further spread of the virus. They also ordered shorter working hours for businesses such as cafes and shops.

"The health system in Belgrade is close to breaking up," Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic said. "That is why I can't understand what we saw last night and the night before."

"It will cost us, there is no doubt," Brnabic said, referring to the possible spread of the virus after large protests which featured little social distancing or mask-wearing.



People wearing a protective face mask to help curb the spread of the coronavirus walk at Shibuya pedestrian crossing Thursday, July 9, 2020, in Tokyo. The Japanese capital has confirmed more than 220 new coronavirus infections, exceeding its previous record.(AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)

Serbia, which has a population of about 6.9 million, has confirmed more than 17,000 cases of the new coronavirus, including 341 deaths. A few hundred new infections are being reported daily. Critics accuse President Aleksandar Vucic of letting the crisis spin out of control by lifting an earlier lockdown to allow for an election last month that tightened his grip on power.

Vucic's announcement this week that new measures would include a lockdown sent thousands into the streets, and rock-throwing demonstrators fought running battles with special police forces. The new government measures don't include the originally planned weekend curfew, but effectively ban further protests.

Flare-ups of new virus cases are causing concern in several parts of the world, and in some cases leading to the reintroduction of restrictions on public activity.



A man hurls a tear gas canister at riot police on the steps of the Serbian parliament during a protest in Belgrade, Serbia, Wednesday, July 8, 2020. Police have fired tear gas at protesters in Serbia's capital during the second day of demonstrations against the president's handling of the country's coronavirus outbreak. President Aleksandar Vucic backtracked on his plans to reinstate a coronavirus lockdown in Belgrade this week, but it didn't stop people from firing flares and throwing stones while trying to storm the downtown parliament building. (AP Photo/Marko Drobnjakovic)

In France and Greece, officials warned that people were too frequently ignoring safety guidance. The French government's leading [coronavirus](#) adviser, Jean-Francois Delfraissy, lamented that "the French in general have abandoned protective measures."

"Everyone must understand that we are at the mercy of a return (of the virus) in France," Delfraissy said. "It suffices to have one super-spreader in a gathering and it will take off again."

Greek government spokesman Stelios Petsas said authorities were "determined to protect the majority from the frivolous few." He said the government may announce new restrictions, if needed, on Monday.

Petsas said authorities were focused on the rising number of cases in nearby Balkan countries and tourists who traveled to Greece over the land border with Bulgaria.



In this July 1, 2020, file photo, a bartender mixes a drink while wearing a mask and face shield at Slater's 50/50 in Santa Clarita, Calif. Getting children back to school safely could mean keeping high-risk spots like bars and gyms closed.

That's the latest thinking from some public health experts. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez, File)



Ultra-Orthodox Jews pray a morning prayer next to their house as synagogues limited to twenty people following the government's measures to help stop the spread of the coronavirus in Bnei Brak, Israel, Thursday, July 9, 2020. Israel is going through a new coronavirus outbreak that is hammering both the economy and public health. The country is reporting more than 1,000 new cases a day and out of work Israelis are irate at the lack of government aid. (AP Photo/Oded Balilty)



A doctor works at an COVID-19 isolation center in Mumbai, India, Wednesday, July 8, 2020. India has overtaken Russia to become the third worst-affected nation by the coronavirus pandemic. (AP Photo/Rajanish Kakade)



Visitors wearing protective gear view art pieces by Indonesian artist Hanafi as she stands on a physical distancing marker placed on the floor as a precaution against the new coronavirus during an exhibition at Kertas Gallery in di Depok, West Java, Indonesia, Thursday, July 9, 2020. (AP Photo/Tatan Syuflana)



Catalonian police officers ask at a woman to wear a face mask, in Las Ramblas of Barcelona, Spain, Thursday, July 9, 2020. Authorities in northeast Spain will start fining individuals who do not wear face masks 100 euros (\$113) as of Thursday when their use becomes obligatory in Barcelona and the surrounding Catalonia region. (AP Photo/Emilio Morenatti)



Doctors wave goodbye to a woman who has recovered from COVID-19, as she leaves an isolation center in Mumbai, India, Wednesday, July 8, 2020. India has overtaken Russia to become the third worst-affected nation by the coronavirus pandemic. (AP Photo/Rajanish Kakade)



Des Moines Public Schools custodian Cynthia Adams cleans a desk in a classroom at Brubaker Elementary School, Wednesday, July 8, 2020, in Des Moines, Iowa. Getting children back to school safely could mean keeping high-risk spots like bars and gyms closed. That's the latest thinking from some public health experts. (AP Photo/Charlie Neibergall)



Riot police start a charge at protestors on the steps of the Serbian parliament during a protest in Belgrade, Serbia, Wednesday, July 8, 2020. Police have fired tear gas at protesters in Serbia's capital during the second day of demonstrations against the president's handling of the country's coronavirus outbreak. President Aleksandar Vucic backtracked on his plans to reinstate a coronavirus lockdown in Belgrade this week, but it didn't stop people from firing flares and throwing stones while trying to storm the downtown parliament building. (AP Photo/Marko Drobnjakovic)

In Australia, which had initial success containing the outbreak, authorities on Thursday reported 179 new cases, most in Melbourne, where authorities are battling a resurgence and have imposed a new six-week lockdown.

Tokyo confirmed more than 220 new cases Thursday, exceeding its record daily increase from mid-April and prompting concerns of widening of the infections. Tokyo's more than 7,000 cases are about one-third of Japan's total.

"It's a wake-up call," Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike told reporters. "We need to use extra caution against the further spread of the infections."

Experts on Tokyo's virus task force said the majority of recent cases were linked to night clubs but rising infections from households, workplaces and parties raised concerns the virus is spreading in the wider community.

Hong Kong moved to tighten social-distancing measures after it reported 42 new infections on Thursday. Rules for restaurants, bars and fitness centers will be tightened for two weeks starting Saturday.

In India, research by the Institute of Mathematical Sciences in Chennai shows that the reproduction rate of the virus ticked up in the first week of July to about 1.2 after it had steadily fallen from a peak of 1.8 in March. The rate needs to be below one for new cases to start falling.

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