

European nations step up virus measures as cases mount

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Eurostar trains from Paris to London may soon be filled with Britons scrambling to return from holiday

European nations among the hardest hit by the coronavirus unveiled further control moves Friday to battle rising cases, hitting summer

tourism and aspects of everyday life on the continent.

Britain added France to its list of countries hit with a mandatory two-week quarantine for returning holidaymakers from Saturday, as Paris confronts a resurgent second wave of infections.

Confirmed cases in France reached levels not seen since May on Wednesday and Thursday, at over 2,500 new cases per day.

"The indicators are bad, the signals are worrying and the situation is deteriorating... The fate of the epidemic is in our hands," the country's national health agency chief Jerome Salomon told France Inter radio, adding that the capital Paris and the Mediterranean port city of Marseille were especially at risk.

But he highlighted that by "mobilising, respecting infection control measures, accepting mass testing," some areas of France had stamped out new virus clusters.

Neighbouring Spain said it would close all discos and ban smoking in the street where people are unable to stay at a safe distance, after the country reported almost 3,000 cases in 24 hours on Thursday.

And Austria added popular Mediterranean destination Croatia to its list of at-risk countries, urging citizens to return home ahead of mandatory tests or quarantine for returnees starting Monday.

COVID-19: Total deaths vs deaths per million

As of August 13

Highest number

Total deaths

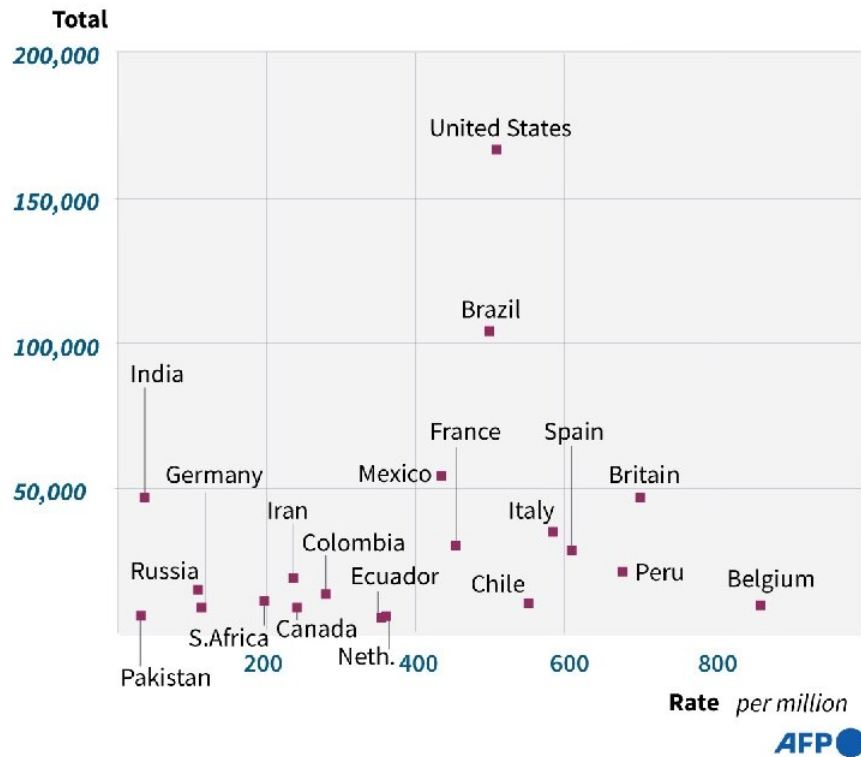
US	167,000+
Brazil	104,200+
Mexico	54,600+
India	47,000+
Britain	46,700+
Italy	35,200+
France	30,300+
Spain	28,600+
Peru	21,700+
Iran	19,100+

Highest rates

Among top 20, per million

Belgium	864
Britain	702
Peru	679
Spain	609
Italy	584
Sweden	565
Chile	550
United States	509
Brazil	497
France	454
Mexico	433

Source: AFP database



Graphic looking at countries with the highest coronavirus death tolls, and their respective death rates.

Around the world, the number of confirmed cases rose to almost 21 million according to an AFP tally from official sources at 1100 GMT, with almost 755,000 people dead.

The United States has suffered the most deaths at 167,253, followed by Brazil with 105,463, Mexico 55,293, India with 48,040 and Britain with 41,347.

Cross-Channel scramble

France and the Netherlands have now joined Spain and several other European nations on Britain's quarantine list, having at first been granted exemptions.

Briton Paul Trower told AFP he decided to cut short his visit to France after receiving several messages from friends warning him of the quarantine measures.

"We looked and tried to book a ferry, cancelled our holidays and come home to avoid it because my wife works and I look after my granddaughter," he said.

"It was already a very bad season and now it's going to be even worse," said Christophe Mathieu, the chief executive of Brittany Ferries which operates services between Britain, Ireland, France and Spain.



CureVac's potential vaccine is undergoing testing in Germany

French holidaymakers in the UK will be faced with tough choices of their own, as Paris swiftly announced a "reciprocal measure", although it was unclear when that might be imposed.

The Netherlands also said it would advise against all but essential travel to Britain, but will not impose a quarantine of its own for incoming travellers.

With more than 41,000 deaths caused by COVID-19, Britain is the worst-hit country in Europe and Prime Minister Boris Johnson has been criticised over his handling of the crisis.

Economic blows

A slew of data Friday revealed the scale of the economic impact of the virus and punishing lockdowns, with Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, the Netherlands, Finland and Denmark all booking hefty hits to GDP in April-June.

"Never before" has the Dutch economy suffered shrinkage of 8.5 percent in a single quarter, the CBS statistics office said, while Denmark and Hungary both reported their worst slumps since the early 1990s.

Central European heavyweight Poland entered its first recession since the end of the communist era.



Hundreds of thousands of Britons in France were deciding whether or not to hurry home

The continent's stock markets groaned under strain on the travel and tourism sectors from the new quarantines and the US failure to agree a new round of economic support for citizens.

One bright spot was German vaccine maker CureVac, set to dip its toe into the US markets with an initial public offering raising more than \$200 million.

The company is seen as one of the leading contenders in the race to develop to a COVID-19 vaccine and received permission in June to start

human trials.

Meanwhile Vietnam said it was looking to buy a bulk order of Russia's "Sputnik" vaccine, although Western scientists raised concerns about the speed of its development and suggested that researchers might be cutting corners.

And Washington said it would distribute any vaccine proven to be effective to all Americans for free.

Mexico said it and Argentina aim to have a vaccine available for Latin America—now the region with the worst virus toll and most cases—early next year under a production agreement with drugs giant AstraZeneca.



Normally busy Auckland arteries were at a standstill

New strain in New Zealand

New Zealand is battling its own second wave of infections and extended a lockdown of its largest city Auckland by at least 12 days, giving health authorities more time to trace and contain a variant of the virus previously unseen in the country.

The Pacific island nation's initial response to the pandemic was hailed a success, but a run of 102 days with no reported community transmission was brought to an end on Tuesday.

The country has now detected a cluster of 30 virus cases, and genomic tests indicated the latest infections were not the same strain of coronavirus recorded earlier this year.

"This suggests it's not a case of the virus being dormant, or of burning embers in our community, it appears to be new to New Zealand," Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said, adding tests were unable to link the outbreak to any cases among quarantined travellers from overseas.

In Latin America, both Mexico and Peru surpassed half a million confirmed infections.

Infections in Peru have also risen sharply since a national lockdown was lifted on July 1, prompting the government to reinstate a Sunday curfew, ban social gatherings and enforce mandatory lockdown in more provinces.

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