

Europe imposes fresh curbs as global cases top 30 million

September 18 2020



Madrid in Spain is experiencing a resurgence of Covid-19

Large parts of Europe on Friday geared up for broad new restrictions to stop the coronavirus and Israel enforced a second nationwide shutdown, as infections worldwide topped the 30-million mark.

Spain was set to unveil a raft of restrictions as officials in Madrid warned the capital had been overwhelmed by the virus and called for "decisive" action from central government.

Santiago Usoz, a medic working at accident and emergency in Madrid's October 12 hospital, told AFP there was a lack of both beds and staff.

"Intensive care units are overwhelmed with COVID patients," he said.

Britain and France are both rolling out new measures in the face of surging caseloads, with UK officials warning that a national lockdown could be reimposed.

Almost 950,000 people have now died from the virus since it first emerged in China late last year, Europe accounting for almost a quarter of those fatalities.

Israel imposed a three-week nationwide shutdown from 2:00 pm (1100 GMT) on Friday hours before Rosh Hashana, the Jewish new year.

The measures, under which people will be limited to within 500 metres of their home, will also hit other key religious holidays including Yom Kippur.

"The economy is in freefall, people are losing their jobs, they're depressed," said 60-year-old Yael, one of hundreds who protested in Tel Aviv late on Thursday.



South Korean health officials from Bupyeong-gu Office wear protective gear to spray disinfectant at a shopping district in Incheon

"And all this for what? For nothing!"

Meanwhile, most of a group of Hasidic Jewish pilgrims who had camped along the Belarusian border with Ukraine left on Friday after Kiev refused them entry in line with its coronavirus rules, and Israel urged them to return.

Tens of thousands of Hasidic Jews head to the central Ukrainian city of Uman every Jewish New Year to visit the tomb of Rabbi Nahman, the founder of the Breslov Hasidic movement.

'Do what it takes'

Anxiety has been growing across Europe about the possible return of stringent measures.

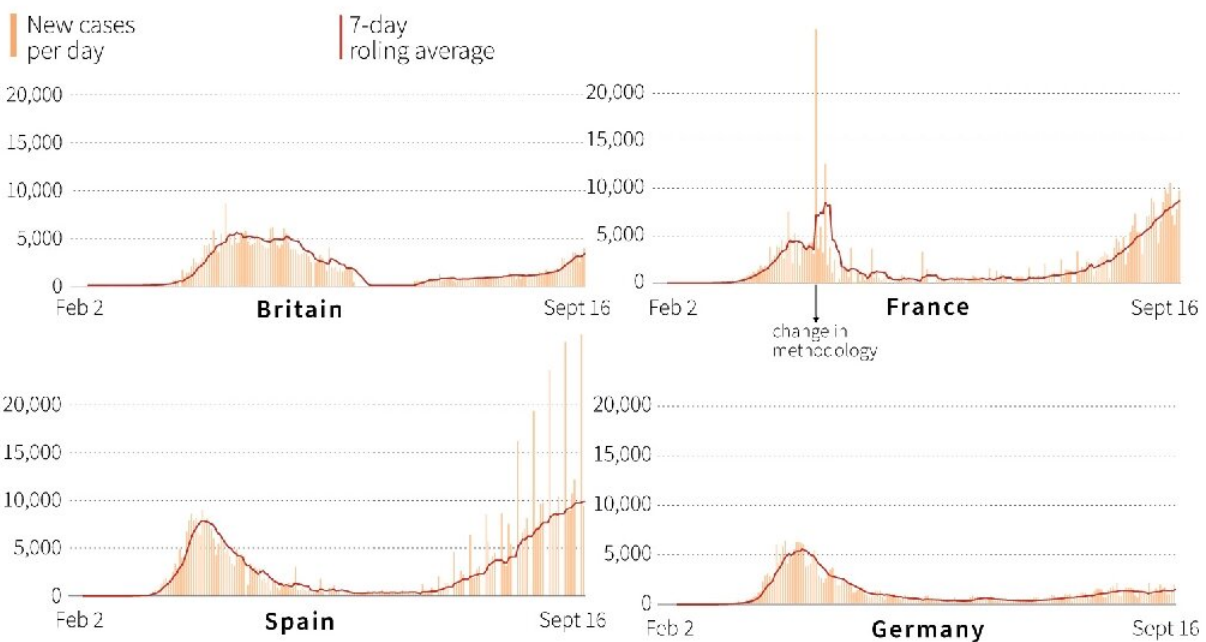
In Britain, new measures on Friday covered about two million people in northeast England, barring them from meeting people outside their homes and obliging entertainment venues to shut early.

The government had already imposed rules across England on Monday limiting socialising to groups of six or fewer, as daily cases reached levels not seen since early May.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock told BBC television on Friday that the government could reimpose a national lockdown.

Covid-19 pandemic in Europe

Selected countries



Source: AFP tallies based on official tolls

AFP

New daily cases of Covid-19 and the 7-day rolling average for selected European countries as of September 17.

"We're prepared to do what it takes both to protect lives and to protect livelihoods," he said.

Meanwhile, London mayor Sadiq Khan said the city's New Year's Eve fireworks display, which annually attracts tens of thousands of people, will not go ahead.

Not everyone is happy with the situation in the UK.

Music legend Van Morrison added his name to the list of artists officially fed up with lockdown measures, saying on Friday he had recorded three "protest songs" against the UK government's lockdown.

The Northern Irish singer-songwriter has called the new tracks "Born To Be Free", "As I Walked Out" and "No More Lockdown".

Emmys mixes it up

French authorities are also preparing tighter restrictions in several cities to curtail a resurgence after daily infections topped 10,000 twice over the last week.

Health minister Olivier Veran said Lyon and Nice would be under new rules by Saturday, after curbs on public gatherings were imposed this week in Bordeaux and Marseille.



A handful of vaccine candidates are currently in late-stage trials

The country's public health agency said on Friday that coronavirus deaths were trending upwards for the first time since the end of the national lockdown.

Italy, meanwhile, said it would partially reopen stadiums to allow up to 1,000 fans at open air sports events from Sunday.

Large sporting and entertainment events have caused major headaches for organisers forced to stay within guidelines on social distancing.

In the United States, which has the highest number of recorded cases, this year's Emmys honouring the best in television—the first major awards show in Hollywood since the coronavirus crisis began—will be held online.

"Ratings have been flagging for award shows for years," said IndieWire TV awards editor Libby Hill. "This is, if nothing else, an opportunity to mix things up."

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