

# Countries battle rising virus cases as WHO sees 'exponential' rise

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SARS-CoV-2 (shown here in an electron microscopy image). Credit: National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, NIH

A number of countries tightened anti-coronavirus measures on Saturday, with France extending a curfew and Belgium bringing forward its own,

as Germany's death toll passed 10,000 and the US reported 80,000 infections in a single day.

In the Belgian capital Brussels, authorities moved up their curfew by an hour, and in Poland, President Andrzej Duda tested positive for COVID-19.

The World Health Organization has warned of an "exponential" rise in infections threatening health systems' ability to cope.

But populations weary of [social isolation](#) and economic hardship have rejected more restrictions and in hard-hit Naples, clashes erupted between Italian police and hundreds of protesters.

In the US, the virus has become a central issue ahead of a November 3 presidential election, with President Donald Trump on Friday promising attendees at a Florida rally that "we're going to quickly end this pandemic, this horrible plague."

Challenger Joe Biden matched Trump's vow to make a vaccine available for free to all "whether or not you're insured" and charged that Trump has "given up" on controlling the outbreak.

Johns Hopkins University reported 79,963 new US cases in 24 hours, a record, though the number of daily deaths has more or less stabilised at between 700 and 800.

Overall, more than 223,000 people have died from COVID-19 in the US.

France on Friday followed Spain past the milestone of one million cases, while the government extended an overnight curfew to around 46 million people.

Prime Minister Jean Castex said Saturday that another 700 million euros (\$830 million) would be made available to help poor people who have been hit hardest by the pandemic.

And after Germany recorded its 10,000th [coronavirus](#) death, Chancellor Angela Merkel said: "The order of the day is to reduce contacts, (and) to meet as few people as possible."

## 'Close to capacity'

On Friday, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that "too many countries are seeing an exponential increase in COVID-19 cases and that is now leading to hospitals and intensive care units running close to or above capacity."

"We urge leaders to take immediate action to prevent further unnecessary deaths," he added.

That message was echoed by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), but moves to reintroduce restrictions were met with protest in parts of the continent.

In Naples, hundreds of demonstrators answered a call on social media to resist a new curfew, throwing objects at police and setting rubbish bins on fire.

The country is reeling from its worst post-war recession after a gruelling two-month national lockdown prompted by one of Europe's worst outbreaks, and authorities have been reluctant to renew drastic quarantine restrictions.

Wales entered a full lockdown late Friday, a day after Ireland shut down, while Poland adopted a nationwide lockdown that partially closed

primary schools and restaurants.

President Duda, 48, said in a tweet that he had tested positive but "felt fine" and was still on the job.

After Spain became the first European country to officially record a million coronavirus cases earlier in the week, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said Friday the real number of infections was likely more than triple that number.

## 'We're overwhelmed'

Across the planet, the pandemic has now claimed the lives of 1.1 million people and infected almost 42 million, with the WHO warning the northern hemisphere was at an especially critical juncture.

In Nagorno-Karabakh, a disputed province of Azerbaijan, doctor Lusine Tovmasyan said that among those she tested in the regional capital Stepanakert, "between 40 and 60 percent of people test positive," often those who are taking shelter in cramped underground spaces.

Belgium has seen one of Europe's deadliest per capita outbreaks and has found itself suffering some of the highest second-wave infection rates in Europe.

"We're losing. We're overwhelmed. We're bitter," said Benoit Misset, head of the [intensive care unit](#) at the University Hospital in Liege, where several medics had to work despite being positive—if asymptomatic—themselves.

In addition to setting a new curfew time of 10:00 pm (2100 GMT as of Sunday), stores in Brussels are to now close at 8:00 pm and athletic or cultural events have been cancelled.

Meanwhile, work has continued on the international quest to find a vaccine, with clinical trials for one candidate by AstraZeneca and Oxford University resuming in the United States on Friday, six weeks after a test subject became ill.

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