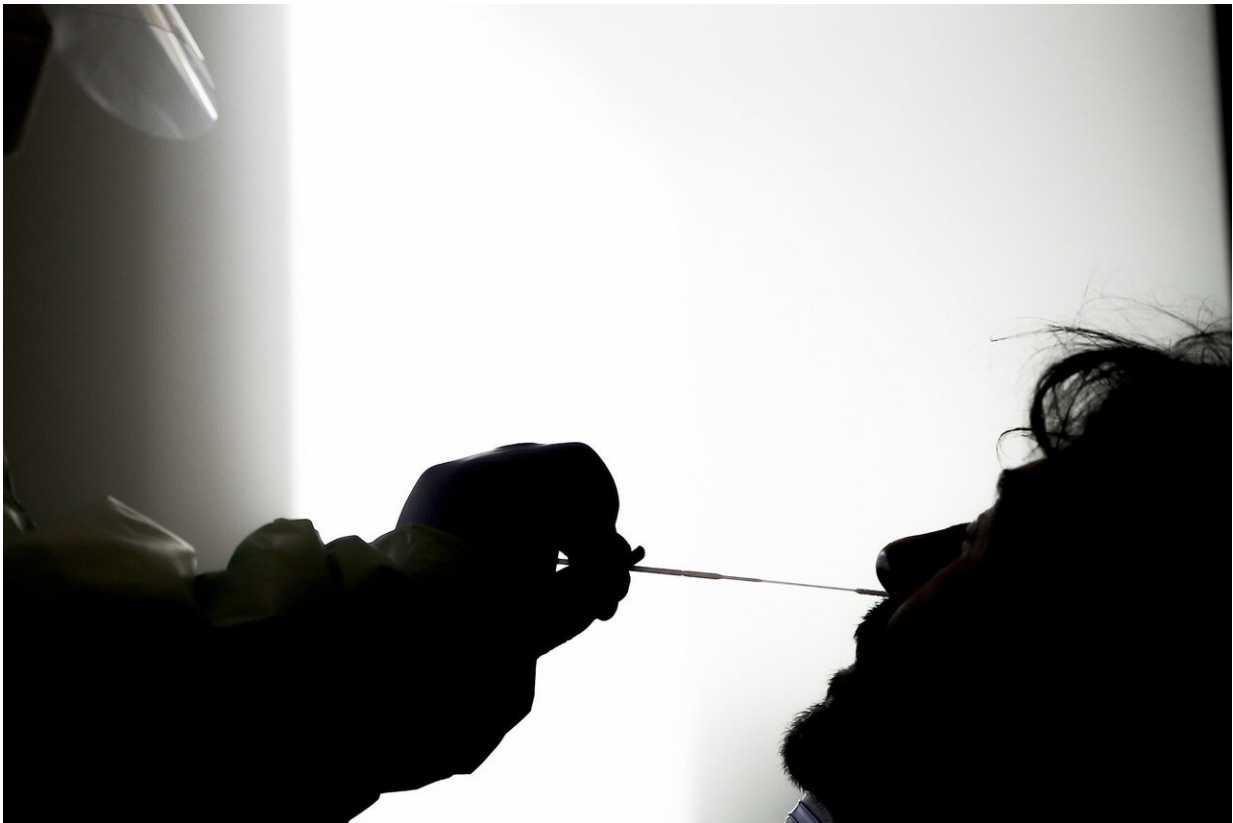


More masks, less play: Europe tightens rules as virus surges

October 13 2020, by Jamey Keaten and Frank Jordans



A medical staffer takes swabs as he tests for COVID-19, in Rome, Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2020. Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte says the aim of Italy's new anti-virus restrictions limiting nightlife and socializing is to head off another generalized lockdown. Conte defended the measures as both "adequate and proportional" to the current need. He spoke Tuesday as the health ministry reported another 5,901 people tested positive over the past day and 41 people died, bringing Italy's official COVID-19 death toll to 36,246, the second highest in Europe after Britain. (Cecilia Fabiano/LaPresse via AP)

Governments across Europe are ratcheting up restrictions to try to beat back a resurgence of the coronavirus that has sent new confirmed infections on the continent to their highest weekly level since the start of the pandemic.

The World Health Organization said Tuesday there were more than 700,000 new COVID-19 cases reported in Europe last week, a jump of 34% from the previous week. Britain, France, Russia and Spain accounted for more than half of the new infections.

The increasing caseload is partly the result of more testing, but the U.N. health agency noted that deaths were also up 16% last week from the week before. Doctors are warning that while many of the new cases are in younger people, who tend to have milder symptoms, the virus could again start spreading widely among older people, resulting in more serious illnesses.

Italy and France are restricting parties and putting limits on restaurants and bars. The Netherlands went further and ordered the closing of all bars and restaurants, And to discourage partying at home, it banned the sale of alcohol after 8 p.m.

The Czech Republic is closing all schools until Nov. 2, while Latvia is ordering teenagers to switch to distance learning for a week. And Britain unveiled a three-tiered system for deciding what restrictions to impose, based on how severe the outbreak is in certain areas.



A shop sells face masks on Oxford Street in London, Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2020. Unemployment across the U.K. rose sharply higher in August which is a clear indication that the jobless rate is set to spike higher when a government salary-support scheme ends this month and new restrictions are imposed on local areas to suppress a resurgence of the coronavirus.(AP Photo/Frank Augstein)

Those moves reflect a new approach to containing the virus among governments wary of hurting already fragile economies. Officials are eager to avoid the total lockdowns they imposed in the spring that resulted in heavy job losses. Instead, they are relying on a patchwork of regional or targeted restrictions that have sometimes caused confusion and frustration by those affected.

The U.N. health agency appeared to support the new approach, with WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic saying lockdowns should be a "last resort."

German Chancellor Angela Merkel told a European Union advisory body Tuesday that she is watching the rising infection figures "with great concern."

"We must not squander now what we achieved through restrictions in recent months," Merkel said in a video address.

"None of us found it easy to impose those restrictions," she added.

"Many people lost their lives, and so it is all the more important that we ensure now that a further lockdown won't be necessary, that our health system isn't overstrained again."



Shoppers walk along Oxford Street in London, Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2020.
Unemployment across the U.K. rose sharply in August which is a clear indication that the jobless rate is set to spike higher when a government salary-support scheme ends this month and new restrictions are imposed on local areas to suppress a resurgence of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Frank Augstein)

Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte ordered bars and restaurants to close at midnight and banned pickup sports games among friends and parties in enclosed spaces. Private gatherings at homes with more than six people who don't live together are also discouraged.

"Our objective is clear: We must prevent our country from plunging back into a generalized lockdown," Conte said.

Italy reported more than 5,900 people tested positive over the past day and 41 people died, bringing the country's official COVID-19 death toll to more than 36,200, the second-highest in Europe after Britain.

The outbreak has spread to the annual Giro d'Italia, which was thrown into chaos after several top riders withdrew from the cycling race following positive tests for the coronavirus.

Italy made masks mandatory outdoors last week, a requirement already in place in Spain, Turkey, India and a few other Asian countries. Elsewhere in Europe, such mandates are in effect in many places in Poland and hot spot cities like Paris and Brussels, and are being introduced in several German cities.



A sign of social distancing guidelines hangs on a street stall in a market in Madrid, Spain, Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2020. The sign reads in Spanish "Remember, keep a safe distance 2 meters". (AP Photo/Bernat Armangue)

In France, which has seen a rapid increase in infections, Paris, Marseille and seven other large cities have been placed under maximum alert, resulting in the closing of bars, gyms and swimming pools. Public parties are banned, and restaurants have to maintain at least 1 meter (3 feet) between tables, with groups of diners limited to six people.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki urged the country's citizens to observe social distancing and wear masks as he himself went into quarantine following contact with someone who later tested positive for COVID-19. He said in a video message that his government was working

as usual and that he had no symptoms.

Poland, a nation of about 38 million, has seen a sharp spike in newly recorded infections, with close to 5,100 cases and 63 deaths reported Tuesday. Over the summer, new daily cases were around 600.



An elderly woman wearing a face mask to prevent the spread of coronavirus walks along street stalls at a fruit market in Madrid, Spain, Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2020. (AP Photo/Bernat Armangué)

Some doctors are warning that Poland's chronically underfunded health care system may collapse if the current rate of new cases continues.

In Britain, which has suffered the deadliest outbreak in Europe, with a toll of more than 43,000, officials defended their new system as striking the right balance. Under the plan unveiled this week, Liverpool is in the highest-risk category, and its pubs, gyms and betting shops have been shut.

"The prime minister has to balance protecting people's lives and the NHS (National Health Service) from the virus while also prioritizing things that matter to us as a society, like education and keeping as many people in employment as possible," Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick told the BBC.

Britain's number of newly confirmed COVID-19 cases has more than tripled in the last three weeks, with infection rates rising across all age groups and regions.



A medical worker, wearing full protective gear, takes a nose swab from a patient to be tested for COVID-19 in a Red Cross test centre in Brussels, Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2020. Authorities in Belgium, one of the European countries hit hardest by the coronavirus, are warning that the number of cases is rising at a "quite alarming" rate and that 10.000 people could be catching the virus each day by the end of the week. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)



A woman sits in a cafe in Milan, Italy, Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2020. Italian Premiere Giuseppe Conte ordered strict new anti-COVID measures early Tuesday, including limits on private gatherings and a ban on casual pickup sports. Bars and restaurants must close at midnight, and drinks can only be consumed at tables—not standing at the bar or outside—after 9 p.m. (AP Photo/Luca Bruno)



A health worker administers the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine currently on phase III clinical trials to Cem Gun an Emergency Medicine Physician at the Acibadem Hospital in Istanbul, Friday, Oct. 9, 2020. The vaccine developed in China by Sinovac Biotech, was approved for trials by Health Institutes of Turkey (TUSEB) in 26 private hospitals in the country. (AP Photo/Emrah Gurel)



Primary care workers hold placards that read in Catalan: "Enough", as they take part in a protest against their working conditions during a strike in Barcelona, Spain, Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2020. Various regions in Spain, including northern Navarra and northeastern Catalonia, are either planning or implementing fresh restrictions against the spread of the new coronavirus. (AP Photo/Emilio Morenatti)



Shoppers walk past a shop window in Oxford Street, London, Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2020. Unemployment across the U.K. rose sharply in August which is a clear indication that the jobless rate is set to spike higher when a government salary-support scheme ends this month and new restrictions are imposed on local areas to suppress a resurgence of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Frank Augstein)



A medical worker prepares to collect nasal swab samples for COVID-19 in the Lyon sports arena, central France, Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2020. The World Health Organization said there were more than 700,000 new COVID-19 cases reported in Europe last week, a jump of 34% compared to the previous week, with Britain, France, Russia and Spain accounting for more than half of new infections recorded in the region. (AP Photo/Laurent Cipriani)



A customer, wearing a face mask to fight against the spread of the coronavirus, tries on a coat at Marolles flea market in Brussels, Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2020. Authorities in Belgium, one of the European countries hit hardest by the coronavirus, are warning that the number of cases is rising at a "quite alarming" rate and that 10.000 people could be catching the virus each day by the end of the week. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)



A woman wears a face mask to prevent the spread of COVID-19 as she commutes at the Garibaldi railway station, in Milan, Italy, Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2020. Italian Premiere Giuseppe Conte ordered strict new anti-COVID measures early Tuesday, including limits on private gatherings and a ban on casual pickup sports. Conte negotiated with the regions to win limits on private gatherings, over the objections of some governors. (AP Photo/Luca Bruno)



Customers wearing masks to prevent the spread of the coronavirus walk through street stalls at a market in Madrid, Spain, on Tuesday, October 13, 2020 (AP Photo/Bernat Armangue)

In an effort to keep people and goods moving throughout the European Union, member countries approved a color-coded system Tuesday.

The countries agreed to not restrict people traveling between green areas—where infection numbers are low—but EU governments will continue to set their own restrictions, such as quarantines or mandatory testing upon arrival, for people coming from orange or red zones.

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