

Germany sets tough new virus curbs as global cases hit record

October 28 2020, by Marianne Barriaux With Tania Lee In Melbourne and Afp Bureaus



Healthcare workers disinfect their protective gear at a hospital in Madrid in Spain, one of the worst-hit countries

Germany on Wednesday imposed drastic curbs on people's daily lives to contain a surge in coronavirus cases and France was set to follow suit as more than 500,000 infections were reported worldwide in a new daily record.

The deepening gloom across the continent and other parts of the world contrasted with the jubilation in Australia's second city of Melbourne where champagne corks popped to celebrate the end of a months-long lockdown.

The pandemic has unleashed devastation across the [global economy](#) since emerging in China at the end of 2019.

On Tuesday alone, a record 516,898 new infections were registered worldwide, according to an AFP tally from [health authorities](#) around the globe.

In the absence of a vaccine or cure, countries are being forced to impose widely unpopular COVID-19 restrictions that have sparked sometimes violent backlashes.

Much of the United States—the worst-hit nation—is also bracing for a tough winter, and the pandemic is dominating the campaign for next week's election.

Reflecting the bleak outlook, European and US stock markets tumbled as investors fretted over looming stringent measures that are likely to further hurt the economy.

Germany cracks down

Faced with soaring cases, Germany ordered shut restaurants, bars and cafes on Wednesday, offering up to 10 billion euros in aid to struggling

sectors to cushion the blow.



Portugal has made wearing masks outside compulsory

The restrictions, which kick in Monday and last to the end of November, will also limit the number of people gathering to a maximum of 10 individuals from two households, Chancellor Angela Merkel announced.

Schools and shops will be allowed to stay open, but swimming pools and other sporting facilities will be shut, and professional sports ordered behind closed doors, she added, acknowledging the measures were "strict" and "arduous."

French President Emmanuel Macron is set to follow suit on Wednesday evening and announce new measures that a [government official](#) said were likely to be "unpopular", as doctors warn that many hospitals are days away from being overrun.

There is widespread speculation that he will decree a lockdown until the end of November, though it will likely be less strict than the stay-at-home orders in place earlier this year.

Drones over cemeteries

In Belgium, which has the most cases per capita in the world, the number of coronavirus hospital admissions has almost matched the level in the first wave in the spring, a public health institute said.



Some French hospitals have been left with no choice but to start transferring patients to less-crowded facilities

Medics in one hospital in Liege are so overstretched that some staff who are themselves infected with COVID are continuing to treat patients.

Prime Minister Alexander de Croo could announce more stringent measures soon.

Meanwhile Madrid will deploy drones at two of the largest cemeteries in the capital on All Saints' Day, when Spaniards traditionally visit graves of their loved ones, to ensure restrictions are respected.

Anger over anti-coronavirus curbs has already boiled over in Spain and Italy, where thousands have protested in recent days.

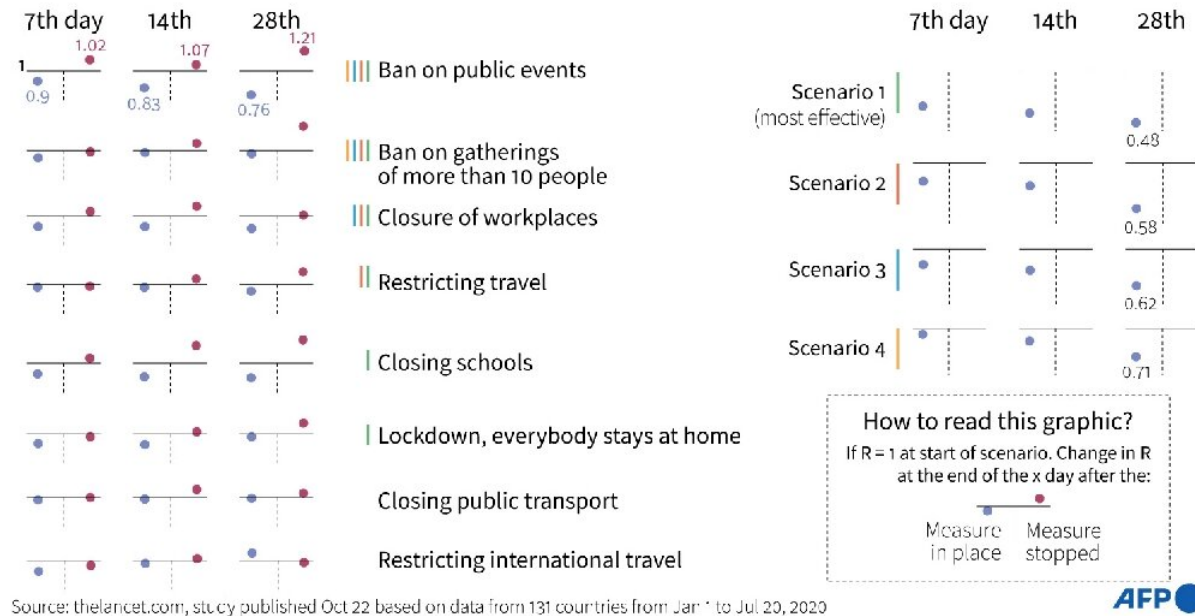
On Wednesday, chefs and restaurateurs rallied in Rome, kicking off protests in 24 cities against rules forcing restaurants, bars, gyms and other businesses to close their doors at 6:00 pm.

Some protests have turned violent in recent days, but health workers counter the curbs are crucial.

"Go on like this, you risk dying in an ambulance or at home, as happened in the spring," said Maurizio Viecca, head of cardiology at Sacco di Milano hospital in the Lombardy region, Italy's worst-hit in the first wave.

Covid-19: what are the most effective restrictions?

The change in the virus' reproduction rate (R). If it is above 1, virus transmission is increasing. If not, it is decreasing.



Covid-19: what are the most effective restrictions?

'A big day for us'

But there was exhilaration and relief Down Under on Wednesday as Melbourne's five million people were able to return to shops and restaurants after months at home.

"It's a big day for us," department store manager Magda Combrinck told AFP.

It was, however, far from a return to business as usual. Shopper Lesley Kind, 71, said many smaller outlets in Melbourne's city centre had yet to reopen or appeared permanently closed.

Across the world, the coronavirus has infected more than 44 million people, with close to 1.2 million deaths.

In India, millions turned out Wednesday to vote in state polls in Bihar despite tens of thousands of new cases every day in the world's second-most infected nation.

Some booths were packed out and many ignored government advice on wearing masks and social distancing, AFP journalists witnessed.



The protest of chefs and restaurant owners in Rome drew politicians of all stripes keen to get on side with the burgeoning movement



Some 70 million people are eligible to vote in Bihar, making this poll the world's biggest vote since the coronavirus emerged

Over in the sporting world, football star Cristiano Ronaldo was left furious when he was left out of Juventus' team for Wednesday's Champions League clash against Barcelona in Turin, as he continued to test positive for [coronavirus](#).

And as the race to find a treatment or cure gathered pace, pharma giant Pfizer voiced measured optimism Tuesday about the prospect of a vaccine becoming available this year.

For its part, the European Union said it had earmarked 100 million euros for quicker tests for the virus.

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