

# Italy closes gyms, shuts eateries early to fight COVID-19

October 26 2020, by Frances D'emilio

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Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte adjusts his face mask as he announces new rules to curb the spread of COVID-19, in Rome, Sunday, Oct. 25, 2020. For at least the next month, people outdoors except for small children must now wear masks in all of Italy, gyms, cinemas and movie theaters will be closed, ski slopes are off-limits to all but competitive skiers and cafes and restaurants must shut down in early evenings, under a decree signed on Sunday by Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte, who ruled against another severe lockdown despite a current surge in COVID-19 infections. (Roberto Monaldo/LaPresse via AP)

Italy's leader imposed at least a month of new restrictions across the country Sunday to fight rising coronavirus infections, shutting down gyms, pools and movie theaters, putting an early curfew on cafes and restaurants and mandating that people keep wearing masks outdoors.

Worried about crippling Italy's stagnant economy, especially after 10 weeks of a severe lockdown earlier in the pandemic, Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte opted against another heavy nationwide lockdown. The new decree goes into effect Monday and lasts until Nov. 24.

"Our aim is to protect health and the economy," Conte said.

A day earlier, Italy surpassed a half million confirmed [coronavirus](#) cases since February, when it became the first country in Europe stricken by the pandemic. On Sunday, Italy registered 21,273 new confirmed cases and 128 deaths since the day before. Italy has reported a total of 37,338 virus deaths, Europe's second-highest pandemic death toll after Britain.

Restaurant and bar owners had lobbied hard against the new measures, which orders them to close at 6 p.m. Most restaurants in Italy usually don't even start to serve dinner before 8 p.m. Cafes and restaurants were allowed in recent months to re-open for outdoor dining or limited indoor seating. But many are struggling to pay their bills and some have already failed after tourists were banned from the United States and many other countries.



A waiter stands outside a cafe in downtown Rome, Sunday, Oct. 25, 2020. For at least the next month, people outdoors except for small children must now wear masks in all of Italy, gyms, cinemas and movie theaters will be closed, ski slopes are off-limits to all but competitive skiers and cafes and restaurants must shut down in early evenings, under a decree signed on Sunday by Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte, who ruled against another severe lockdown despite a current surge in COVID-19 infections. (Cecilia FabianoLaPresse via AP)

Conte promised financial aid from his center-left government as soon as November to the food sector and noted that cafes and restaurants can do delivery and takeout orders until midnight. But before the curfew, no more than four diners will be allowed per [restaurant](#) table, unless they are from the same family.

Under the new rules, ski slopes are off-limits to all but competitive skiers and all spectators are banned from stadiums during professional sports matches, including soccer. Receptions after religious or civil ceremonies like weddings are forbidden. The decree continues to exempt children younger than six and those exercising outdoors from wearing masks.

"We all have to do small sacrifices," Conte said. "If we can't go to the gym, we can exercise outdoors."

Conte kept elementary and [middle schools](#) open but said 75% of high school students must have remote classes. Crowding on [public transit](#), especially since schools reopened last month, has concerned health authorities.



In this Saturday, May 9, 2020 file photo, restaurant owner Paolo Polli stages a protest in Milan, Italy. The coronavirus pandemic is gathering strength again in Europe and, with winter coming, its restaurant industry is struggling. The spring lockdowns were already devastating for many, and now a new set restrictions is dealing a second blow. Some governments have ordered restaurants closed; others have imposed restrictions curtailing how they operate. (AP Photo/Luca Bruno, File)

By [early summer](#), after Italy's lockdown was all but lifted, new virus caseloads had dropped as low as 200 a day.

"These are difficult days," Health Minister Roberto Speranza said after Conte explained the aim of the latest limits. "The curve of contagion is growing in the world. And in all Europe the wave is very high. We must react immediately and with determination if we want to avoid unsustainable numbers."

Several Italian regions and cities recently slapped on overnight curfews to cut down on young people congregating outdoors, especially to drink. But Conte said given the approaching cold weather, people would prefer to socialize inside at bars and restaurants instead, so that's why he ordered them to close early.

On Friday, demonstrators in Naples protested a 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew and clashed with police. On Saturday night, far-right and neo-fascist political groups led a similar protest in Rome against that city's curfew.



A pizza maker prepares a pizza in a restaurant in downtown Rome, Sunday, Oct. 25, 2020. For at least the next month, people outdoors except for small children must now wear masks in all of Italy, gyms, cinemas and movie theaters will be closed, ski slopes are off-limits to all but competitive skiers and cafes and restaurants must shut down in early evenings, under a decree signed on Sunday by Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte, who ruled against another severe lockdown despite a current surge in COVID-19 infections. (Cecilia FabianoLaPresse via AP)



Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte announces new rules to curb the spread of COVID-19, in Rome, Sunday, Oct. 25, 2020. For at least the next month, people outdoors except for small children must now wear masks in all of Italy, gyms, cinemas and movie theaters will be closed, ski slopes are off-limits to all but competitive skiers and cafes and restaurants must shut down in early evenings, under a decree signed on Sunday by Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte, who ruled against another severe lockdown despite a current surge in COVID-19 infections. (Roberto Monaldo/LaPresse via AP)



Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte prepares to announce new rules to curb the spread of COVID-19, in Rome, Sunday, Oct. 25, 2020. For at least the next month, people outdoors except for small children must now wear masks in all of Italy, gyms, cinemas and movie theaters will be closed, ski slopes are off-limits to all but competitive skiers and cafes and restaurants must shut down in early evenings, under a decree signed on Sunday by Conte, who ruled against another severe lockdown despite a current surge in COVID-19 infections. (Roberto Monaldo/LaPresse via AP)





People spill beer on the ground during a protest against the government restriction measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, in Rome, Saturday, Oct. 24, 2020. Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte, who imposed severe-stay-at-home limits on citizens early on, then gradually eased travel and other restrictions, has been leaving it up to regional governors in this current surge of infections to order restrictions such as overnight curfews, including in places like Rome, Milan and Naples. (Mauro Scrobogna/LaPresse via AP)



People eat in a restaurant in central Rome, Sunday, Oct. 25, 2020. For at least the next month, people outdoors except for small children must now wear masks in all of Italy, gyms, cinemas and movie theaters will be closed, ski slopes are off-limits to all but competitive skiers and cafes and restaurants must shut down in early evenings, under a decree signed on Sunday by Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte, who ruled against another severe lockdown despite a current surge in COVID-19 infections. (Cecilia FabianoLaPresse via AP)



A police officer patrols as a bike burns during a protest called by Forza Nuova far right group against the government restriction measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, in Rome Saturday, Oct. 24, 2020. A midnight-to-5 a.m. curfew in Italy's Lazio region, which includes Rome, begins on Friday and lasts for 30 days, under orders from regional governor Nicola Zingaretti. (Cecilia Fabiano/LaPresse via AP)



Police officers patrol during a protest called by Forza Nuova far right group against the government restriction measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, in Rome Saturday, Oct. 24, 2020. A midnight-to-5 a.m. curfew in Italy's Lazio region, which includes Rome, begins on Friday and lasts for 30 days, under orders from regional governor Nicola Zingaretti. (Cecilia Fabiano/LaPresse via AP)



People gather in Piazza del Popolo square during a protest called by Forza Nuova far right group against the government restriction measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, in Rome Saturday, Oct. 24, 2020. A midnight-to-5 a.m. curfew in Italy's Lazio region, which includes Rome, begins on Friday and lasts for 30 days, under orders from regional governor Nicola Zingaretti. (Cecilia Fabiano/LaPresse via AP)



Flares explode as people gather in Piazza del Popolo square during a protest called by Forza Nuova far right group against the government restriction measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, in Rome Saturday, Oct. 24, 2020. A midnight-to-5 a.m. curfew in Italy's Lazio region, which includes Rome, begins on Friday and lasts for 30 days, under orders from regional governor Nicola Zingaretti. (Cecilia Fabiano/LaPresse via AP)



In this Wednesday, Oct. 21, 2020 file photo, empty tables of a restaurant in the Duomo Square in Milan, Italy. The coronavirus pandemic is gathering strength again in Europe and, with winter coming, its restaurant industry is struggling. The spring lockdowns were already devastating for many, and now a new set restrictions is dealing a second blow. Some governments have ordered restaurants closed; others have imposed restrictions curtailing how they operate. (AP Photo/Luca Bruno, File)



A man sits at a table at a restaurant in Rome, Sunday, Oct. 25, 2020. For at least the next month, people outdoors except for small children must now wear masks in all of Italy, gyms, cinemas and movie theaters will be closed, ski slopes are off-limits to all but competitive skiers and cafes and restaurants must shut down in early evenings, under a decree signed on Sunday by Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte, who ruled against another severe lockdown despite a current surge in COVID-19 infections. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)





People have dinner at a restaurant in the Campo dei Fiori neighborhood, downtown Rome, Sunday, Oct. 25, 2020. For at least the next month, people outdoors except for small children must now wear masks in all of Italy, gyms, cinemas and movie theaters will be closed, ski slopes are off-limits to all but competitive skiers and cafes and restaurants must shut down in early evenings, under a decree signed on Sunday by Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte, who ruled against another severe lockdown despite a current surge in COVID-19 infections. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)



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Clients sit in a restaurant in Rome, Sunday, Oct. 25, 2020. For at least the next month, people outdoors except for small children must now wear masks in all of Italy, gyms, cinemas and movie theaters will be closed, ski slopes are off-limits to all but competitive skiers and cafes and restaurants must shut down in early evenings, under a decree signed on Sunday by Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte, who ruled against another severe lockdown despite a current surge in COVID-19 infections. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)



A client sits at a restaurant in Rome, Sunday, Oct. 25, 2020. For at least the next month, people outdoors except for small children must now wear masks in all of Italy, gyms, cinemas and movie theaters will be closed, ski slopes are off-limits to all but competitive skiers and cafes and restaurants must shut down in early evenings, under a decree signed on Sunday by Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte, who ruled against another severe lockdown despite a current surge in COVID-19 infections. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)

Conte said he understood the frustration of citizens, whose incomes and way of life are being heavily hit by pandemic limitations.

"I'd feel anger, too, toward the government," he said, but noted that authorities had determined that the protests were also fueled by agitators.

Since early in the pandemic, masks have been required on Italy's public transit and in indoor venues like supermarkets and other stores.

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