

Leaders in US, Europe divided on response to surging virus

October 20 2020, by Brady McCombs and Adam Geller



Shoppers buy face masks on O'Connell Street in Dublin city centre, Tuesday Oct. 20, 2020. Ireland's government is putting the country at its highest level of coronavirus restrictions for six weeks in a bid to combat a rise in infections. The measures take effect at midnight Wednesday and run until Dec. 1. (Niall Carson/PA via AP)

Virus cases are surging across Europe and many U.S. states, but responses by leaders are miles apart, with officials in Ireland, France and elsewhere imposing curfews and restricting gatherings even as some U.S. governors resist mask mandates or more aggressive measures.

The stark contrasts in efforts to contain infections come as outbreaks on both sides of the Atlantic raise similar alarms, including shrinking availability of hospital beds and rising deaths.

Governors of states including Tennessee, Oklahoma, Nebraska and North Dakota are all facing calls from doctors and public health officials to require masks.

In Utah, a spike in cases since school reopened has created a dynamic that Republican Gov. Gary Herbert has called "unsustainable."

But Herbert, who has been pressured by an outspoken contingent of residents opposed to masks, has resisted a statewide mandate. Instead, he announced last week that they would be required only in six counties with the highest infection rates, while leaving it to others to make their own rules. Meanwhile, many hospitals are being pushed to the breaking point.

"We are not just managing COVID. We are also managing heart attacks and strokes and respiratory failure and all those other things that need ICU-level care," said Dr. Kencee Graves, chief medical officer for inpatient care at the University of Utah Health hospital in Salt Lake City. The hospital's intensive care unit was filled by the end of last week, forcing the reopening of a backup intensive care unit.



In this Sept. 5, 2020, file photo, people gather during a "Trash Your Mask Protest" rally hosted by the Utah Business Revival at the Utah State Capitol in Salt Lake City. Virus cases are surging across Europe and many U.S. states, but responses by leaders are miles apart, with officials in Ireland, France and elsewhere imposing curfews and restricting gatherings even as some U.S. governors resist mask mandates or more aggressive measures. (AP Photo/Rick Bowmer, File)

"The sooner we take care of each other, wear masks, physically distance, the sooner we can have some gatherings in a safe way," Graves said.

In Oklahoma, where the number of people hospitalized for the virus has reached record levels, doctors have called on officials to do more.

"We need face mask mandates to protect more of our Oklahoma citizens," Dr. George Monks, the president of the Oklahoma State Medical Association, said in a tweet Sunday.

But Gov. Kevin Stitt, a Republican, reiterated Tuesday that he has no plans to do so and would instead leave such decisions to local officials. The state's three largest cities have mask requirements in place.

Oklahoma health officials reported a record high of 821 people hospitalized Tuesday with the virus or under investigation for the infection. Wyoming also reported a record high number of patients hospitalized for the virus.



In this Sept. 5, 2020, file photo, people gather during a "Trash Your Mask Protest" rally hosted by the Utah Business Revival at the Utah State Capitol in Salt lake City. Virus cases are surging across Europe and many U.S. states, but responses by leaders are miles apart, with officials in Ireland, France and

elsewhere imposing curfews and restricting gatherings even as some U.S. governors resist mask mandates or more aggressive measures. Herbert, who has been pressured by an outspoken contingent of residents opposed to masks, has resisted a statewide mandate. (AP Photo/Rick Bowmer, File)

New virus cases in the U.S. have surged in recent weeks from a daily average of about 42,000 in early October to about 58,000—the highest level since late July, according to Johns Hopkins University.

In one of the most troubling outbreaks, 10 residents of a nursing home in northwest Kansas have died from the virus, health officials said. All 62 residents of the Andbe Home in Norton County, as well as an unspecified number of employees, have tested positive for the infection.

The surge in new cases prompted a change of heart Monday from the mayor of Fargo, North Dakota, about a mask mandate.

Mayor Tim Mahoney, who is also a general surgeon, had been largely supportive of Republican Gov. Doug Burgum's approach of leaving management of the virus to local officials. Mahoney, himself, cast the deciding vote against a city mask mandate early this month.



In this Oct. 17, 2020, file photo, a waiter closes a bar terrace in Paris. Virus cases are surging across Europe and many U.S. states, but responses by leaders are miles apart, with officials in Ireland, France and elsewhere imposing curfews and restricting gatherings even as some U.S. governors resist mask mandates or more aggressive measures. (AP Photo/Lewis Joly, File)

But with North Dakota leading the nation in new cases and up to one in four local tests for the virus coming back positive, Mahoney said a statewide change is in order. Late Monday, he also reversed course on a local measure, mandating that city residents wear masks when they're in close proximity to people other than family members. There is no penalty for non-compliance.

The dynamic contrasts sharply with Europe, where national officials are

battling similar spikes with measures including new lockdowns and smart phone apps that track the virus' spread.

In Ireland, Prime Minister Micheal Martin announced a lockdown starting at midnight Wednesday that will close all non-essential stores, limit restaurants to carryout service and require people to stay within three miles (five kilometers) of their homes, while banning visits to other households.

It marks a near-return to restrictions imposed by the government in March, although schools, construction sites and manufacturing industries will remain open. If people comply with the restrictions, which will be in place until Dec. 1, the country will be able to celebrate Christmas "in a meaningful way," Martin said.



In this Oct. 17, 2020, file photo, Champs-Elysees avenue is almost empty during curfew in Paris. French restaurants, cinemas and theaters are trying to figure out how to survive a new curfew aimed at stemming the flow of record new coronavirus infections. The monthlong curfew came into effect Friday at midnight, and France is deploying 12,000 extra police to enforce it. (AP Photo/Lewis Joly)



Police patrol in the streets as the curfew starts in Paris, Saturday, Oct. 17, 2020. French restaurants, cinemas and theaters are trying to figure out how to survive a new curfew aimed at stemming the flow of record new coronavirus infections. The monthlong curfew came into effect Friday at midnight, and France is deploying 12,000 extra police to enforce it. (AP Photo/Lewis Joly)

But as cases surge, some decisions by European leaders to impose new restrictions are facing stiff opposition at the local level. After a tense faceoff, Britain's government said Tuesday it had failed to reach agreement with Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham, who has rejected tough new measures without money to support the workers and businesses that will be most affected.

Britain's Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick expressed disappointment with Burnham, saying the mayor "has been unwilling to take the action that is required to get the spread of the virus under control." Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Tuesday he would impose the restrictions, drawing criticism from Burnham.

"It cannot be right to close people's place of work, to shut somebody's business, without giving them proper support," Burnham said. He said Manchester had sought 90 million pounds (\$117 million) from the national government to help people get through the winter. It was unclear how much the city would receive.

In the Netherlands, which has one of the highest infection rates in Europe, a judge in The Hague rejected an appeal by more than 60 Dutch bars and restaurants to overturn a government four-week closure order.

Lawyer Simon van Zijll, representing the bars and restaurants, warned in court that the Dutch hospitality industry faces "a tidal wave of bankruptcies" caused by the lockdown order, which he described as "random and disproportionate."

© 2020 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: Leaders in US, Europe divided on response to surging virus (2020, October 20)
retrieved 5 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-10-leaders-europe-response-surging-virus.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.