

Madrid back in lockdown as Europe virus cases up 28% over week

October 9 2020



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Spain's government declared a state of emergency and new partial lockdown for virus-hit Madrid on Friday after a court struck down previous measures, in a sign of the difficult battles waged across a restriction-weary Europe.

While full lockdowns in March and April were largely accepted,

governments are facing increased resistance as they try to contain a second wave of coronavirus infections at the start of autumn.

In Madrid, restrictions from the central government barring people from leaving the city except for work, school or medical reasons have been loudly opposed by rightwing city authorities and were rejected by a regional court on Thursday.

In response, Health Minister Salvador Illa said the Socialist-led government would declare a [state of emergency](#), giving it powers to reimpose the measures on 4.5 million people in and around the capital.

"Protecting the health of Madrid's people is absolutely essential," Illa said.

The resistance in Madrid echoes problems the French government faced last month when it shut bars and restaurants in the southern port of Marseille, where local representatives reacted with fury.

Partial shutdowns have since been extended to Paris and other major urban areas, while another four French cities were placed on maximum coronavirus alert on Thursday, meaning they will have to shut bars and limit public gatherings.

The data offers little respite, with more than 20,000 new cases reported on Friday.

The European Union tried to bring some order to the travel chaos created by a fast-changing situation, agreeing on a traffic light system to identify risk areas and set recommendations, though it will remain voluntary for individual countries.

Latin America worst-affected

Overall, the coronavirus has continued its progression around the world this week, with 315,000 new cases on average per day, or six percent more than the previous week, according to an AFP tally on Friday.

Once again, the increase was most marked in Europe, which recorded 28 percent more cases than the previous seven-day period.

But in the longer term, it is Latin America that faces the hardest impact from the pandemic, the World Bank warned Friday, forecasting a 7.9 percent drop in regional GDP this year.

"The number of deaths per million people is as high as in advanced economies, if not more, but the resources available to counter the shock are much more constrained," it said in a report.

In Germany, considered one of the best-performing countries worldwide in managing the pandemic, Chancellor Angela Merkel warned Friday that high-infection areas would be given 10 days to bring down cases before tougher action was taken.

"We all sense that the big cities, the urban areas, are now the arena where we will see if we can keep the pandemic under control in Germany as we have done for months, or if we lose control," Merkel said after talks with German mayors.

Russia meanwhile registered a record 12,126 new coronavirus infections on Friday, surpassing its previous daily high set in May.

Russian officials have declined to impose any new restrictions since they were lifted in May, but the new figures appear to be prompting a re-think.

In the world's hardest-hit country, the United States, President Donald

Trump announced tentative plans to hold rallies this weekend, despite receiving treatment all week for coronavirus.

Trump's doctor issued a statement saying he was fit for a "[safe return](#) to public engagement" from Saturday.

But there is widespread scepticism about the president's true state of health, given doctors' refusal to explain exactly when he was infected and when he last had a negative test.

Media reports said the White House was preparing a \$1.8 trillion economic rescue plan, though with political divisions at fever pitch ahead of the imminent presidential election, it faces major roadblocks.

Stranded migrants

As the costs of the global pandemic continue to rise in terms of lost lives and businesses, the United Nations released figures on Friday showing the toll on the world's migrant workers.

The UN's International Organization for Migration said around 2.75 million migrants who wished to return home have been stranded abroad because of restrictions put in place to fight the [coronavirus](#) pandemic.

Border closures and restrictions on air travel meant many were stranded and short of food, water, shelter and repatriation, the IOM said.

Most of them—1.26 million—were from the Middle East and North Africa, with another million from Asia and the Pacific.

In one rare display of normality on Sunday, however, New Zealand and Australia will play the first rugby Test since the start of the pandemic in front of a packed, largely mask-free crowd in Wellington.

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Citation: Madrid back in lockdown as Europe virus cases up 28% over week (2020, October 9)
retrieved 24 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-10-madrid-lockdown-europe-virus-cases.html>

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