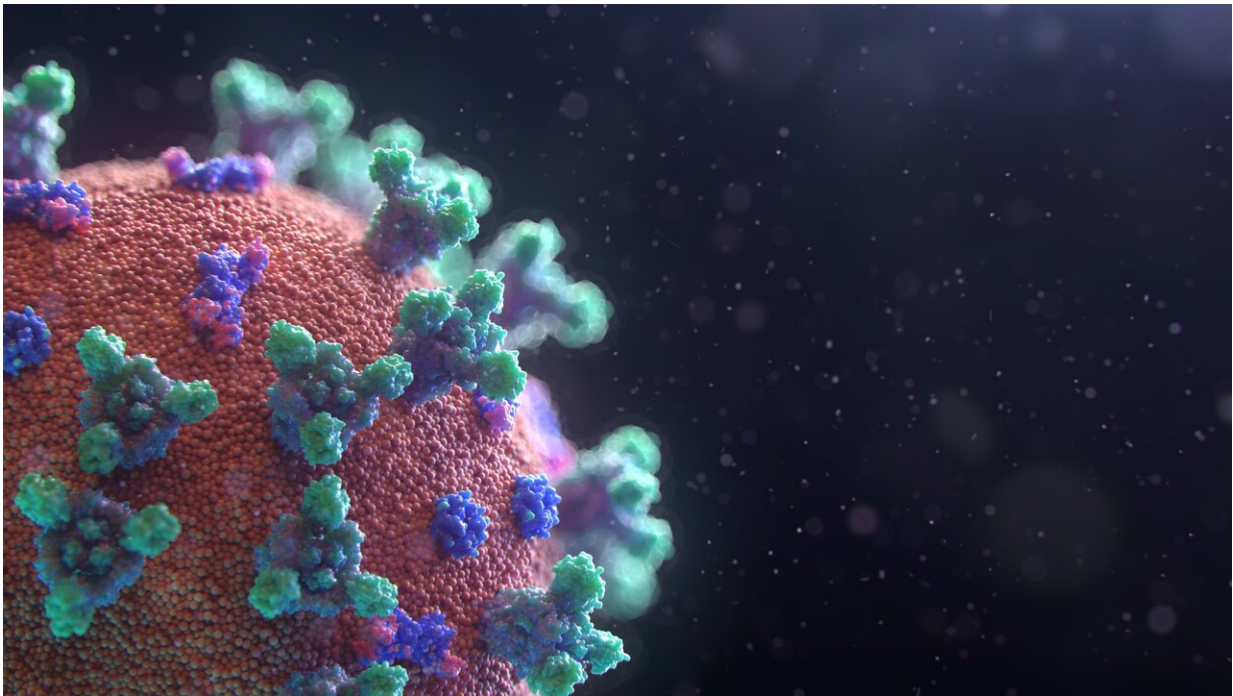


# Spanish court rejects lockdown as Europe faces virus surge

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Madrid's top court struck down virus restrictions on millions in the Spanish capital on Thursday, while France put four more cities on its highest alert as European governments battled to control a sustained surge in virus cases.

Bars and cafes have faced tightening curfews or been shuttered

altogether across major European cities in recent days, while Austria and Poland became the latest to toughen their rules on mask-wearing and other measures.

With France recording a new record of 18,746 daily cases on Wednesday, it placed Lille, Lyon, Grenoble and Saint-Etienne on maximum alert—joining Paris and Aix-Marseille in having to shut all bars and place stricter demands on restaurants.

Records are tumbling across the continent—even in Germany, which has been praised for its handling of the crisis but which logged more than 4,000 new cases in a day for the first time since April.

"It's possible that the virus will spread uncontrollably," said Lothar Wieler, the head of Germany's Robert Koch Institute for disease control.

Spain's anti-virus strategy was thrown into confusion on Thursday when judges refused to approve a lockdown order, arguing that the central health ministry had acted beyond its powers in imposing the measures because health policy is devolved to local governments.

Officials scrambled to get back on track, pleading with residents not to leave the city despite the court ruling—especially with a long weekend approaching for Spain's National Day—but police have no legal grounds for issuing fines for non-compliance and the order is in effect void.

## **'Partying' youth**

The usual cut and thrust of political campaigning in the United States has already been scratched from this year's presidential election contest thanks to coronavirus—no battle-buses or baby-kissing for President Donald Trump and challenger Joe Biden.

The pair did manage to hold one televised debate, but organisers have insisted that the second one is held online following Trump's positive test and hospitalisation for COVID-19.

While Biden said he looked forward to "speaking directly to the American people", Trump accused organisers of trying to protect his rival. "I'm not going to do a virtual debate," he said on Thursday.

The disease has killed more than 210,000 in the US, the worst affected country.

Both contenders are over 70 years old, putting them in a high-risk category.

At the other end of the age scale, Germany's health minister sought to explain his country's upsurge in cases by pointing the finger at young people.

They are "partying, travelling, thinking they are invincible", said Jens Spahn, "but they're not". He urged young people to think of the potential harm they were doing to older relatives.

Germany's jump in cases has coincided with autumn school holidays in many parts of Germany, prompting calls from Chancellor Angela Merkel's government for citizens to avoid travel abroad.

## **Sporting headaches**

The sports world continues to face upheaval due to the virus.

In football, AC Milan veteran Zlatan Ibrahimovic again tested positive, meaning he is likely to miss the Milan derby this month.

A member of Lewis Hamilton's Mercedes team tested positive ahead of this weekend's Eifel Grand Prix, which the six-time champion said was "definitely a concern".

American Football also faces scheduling nightmares, as a number of cases at the Tennessee Titans throws their upcoming matches into uncertainty.

But the real damage is economic, and the IMF warned that even without enforced restrictions, there was no guarantee of a rebound.

The Spanish court intervention adds another layer of complexity to the already tricky task of judging the severity and duration of restrictions and lockdowns, which have battered the world economy.

No European country has yet taken the plunge into a second national lockdown, most governments choosing instead to impose local restrictions or target particular sectors.

Crowded bars and cafes in Belgium's capital Brussels have been ordered to close for a month in a return to the stricter protocols imposed at the height of the epidemic in March and April.

Scotland imposed a two-week ban on pubs in its main cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh on Wednesday, increasing pressure on Prime Minister Boris Johnson's UK government to take similar steps in England.

The novel coronavirus has killed more than a million people and infected more than 36 million since the outbreak emerged in China late last year.

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