

UN: Skiing may not spread coronavirus but slopes still risky

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In this Friday, Feb. 22, 2019 file photo, people ride ski lifts as other skiers slide down the hill on a sunny day at the Faraya-Mzaar ski resort, in Faraya, northeast of Beirut, Lebanon. As several countries have suspended access to the ski slopes to stop the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, the World Health Organization's emergencies chief said the risk of catching COVID-19 while skiing is likely minimal. "I suspect many people won't be infected barreling down the slopes on their skis," said Dr. Michael Ryan at a WHO news briefing on Monday, Nov, 30, 2020. (AP Photo/Bilal Hussein, file)

As several European countries have suspended access to the ski slopes to stop the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, the World Health Organization's emergencies chief said the risk of catching COVID-19 while skiing is likely minimal.

"I suspect many people won't be infected barreling down the slopes on their skis," said Dr. Michael Ryan said at a WHO news briefing on Monday. The U.N. health agency has previously said the [coronavirus](#) transmits much less easily outside because it is dispersed in the fresh air. Restrictions to slow the spread of COVID-19 have kept ski lifts closed in Italy, France, Germany, Austria and elsewhere.

Ryan said the danger of [coronavirus](#) spread from [skiing](#) is from many of the other activities linked to the sport.

"The real issues are going to come at airports, tour buses taking people to and from [ski resorts](#), ski lifts ... and places where people come together," Ryan said. "We would advise that all countries look at the their ski season and other reasons for mass gathering," he said, warning that indoor socializing after skiing might be particularly risky.

Earlier this year, [ski resorts](#) in France, Italy and Austria were the sites of several superspreading events that helped seed COVID-19 outbreaks across the continent.

Ryan said that rather than targeting any specific sport like [skiing](#) or hiking, governments should consider how best to reduce contact between people to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

"The issue is any activity that involves large numbers of people moving into a concentrated space and then using public and other transport to get

there and back needs to be managed carefully," Ryan said.

WHO noted that last week marked the first time global cases of COVID-19 have dropped since September, citing the effectiveness of recent lockdown measures across Europe. WHO's director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, called it "welcome news," but said the decrease should be "interpreted with extreme caution."

Tedros said that the upcoming holiday season should prompt people to think twice about how they might celebrate during the pandemic.

"Being with family and friends is not worth putting them all (and) yourself at risk," he said. "We all need to consider whose life we might be gambling with in the decisions we make."

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