

# Europe's coronavirus infections top 11 million

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Europe passed a new bleak milestone Tuesday after reporting more than 11 million coronavirus cases, as Austria and Greece became the latest countries on the continent to impose shutdowns.

Still reeling from a deadly shooting spree in the streets of Vienna on

Monday evening, Austria went into partial lockdown while Greece shut down major cities.

They joined Belgium, France, Germany and Ireland in re-imposing tough curbs on people's lives in an echo of last spring as the virus that first emerged in China at the end of 2019 shows no sign of abating.

Meanwhile the Netherlands extended a partial shutdown to museums, cinemas and zoos as the government said new cases were not slowing quickly enough.

Europe has now registered 11,008,465 infections and almost 285,000 deaths according to an AFP tally of official sources on Tuesday.

## **Books for the soul**

The stringent new measures that are also set to hit England this week have caused exasperation and anger as experts say Europe risks being hit with further waves of infections next year if no effective vaccine is found.

Underscoring the pernicious effect of restrictions on economies, livelihoods and general wellbeing, Spain—where tourism accounts for 13 percent of employment—said the number of foreign visitors plunged by 75 percent during the first nine months of the year.

The aviation industry has also been hard-hit.

In the Netherlands, KLM pilots agreed to a five-year pay cut to unblock a planned bailout of the struggling airline.

The Spanish government meanwhile said it would offer a 475-million-euro (\$553-million) lifeline to Air Europa to help see the airline through

the pandemic.

Looking forward, countries are seeking desperately for ways to ease or avoid lockdowns.

The British government is rolling out quick-result coronavirus tests for the entire population of its hard-hit, 500,000-strong city of Liverpool in a pilot scheme that could be scaled up nationwide.

The tests "can be a massive and possibly decisive use to us in this country in defeating the virus", Prime Minister Boris Johnson said.

"So amid the uncertain gloom of November I see light ahead, and I'm absolutely certain that we will have better days before us."

The city joins Slovakia, which has decided to test its entire population of 5.4 million people.

In Belgium, which has one of the highest number of deaths compared to its population, authorities might have shut down the country but have nonetheless decided to keep book stores open for the sake of people's mental wellbeing.

"In a period of anguish and uncertainty that brings us back to our own mortality, the book probably remains the best food for thought and reflection," said Brussels bookseller Marc El Khadem, as customers thumbed through pages around him.

## **Transferring patients**

In Greece, cafes, restaurants, bars, gyms, cinemas and theatres and most non-essential businesses shut down in Athens and in the northern cities of Thessaloniki and Serres, which went under even harsher lockdowns.

The curbs have drawn concern among business-owners and employees in a country that only recently emerged from a crippling financial crisis that began in 2010.

Neighbour Turkey also imposed restrictions, saying restaurants, cinemas and other businesses would have to shut at 10:00 pm.

Over in France, a hospitals federation said the pressure was such that authorities were planning to transfer COVID-19 patients to Germany for treatment—as Belgium is already doing.

As for Germany, it should postpone non-urgent surgeries to free up beds and staff, advised Uwe Janssens, president of the Interdisciplinary Association for Intensive Care and Emergency Medicine.

## **Vaccine hopes**

The virus, which has already killed more than 1.2 million people worldwide, has not spared the top corridors of power.

Algeria's President Abdelmadjid Tebboune is currently hospitalised in Germany with COVID-19 and "gradually recovering", his office said Tuesday.

And aviation bosses who celebrated the long-delayed opening of Berlin's new international airport were forced into quarantine after a local official tested positive for the virus.

Amid all the uncertainty, drug companies are rushing to produce what has become the sector's holy grail—a viable vaccine.

The World Health Organization has identified at least nine candidate vaccines at the most advanced phase-three stage, in which effectiveness

is tested on a large scale.

On Tuesday, Dubai ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum said he had received an experimental coronavirus vaccine, becoming the latest United Arab Emirates official to take part in trials.

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