

Europe virus toll crosses 400,000, shops reopen in France

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Shoppers flocked to the Galeries Lafayette department store in Paris as it reopened on Saturday

Coronavirus deaths topped 400,000 Saturday in Europe, the world's second worst-hit region, as parts of the continent began to reopen shops

for the holiday season.

But across the Atlantic fearful US shoppers turned to online outlets for a massive Black Friday sale, while densely populated Los Angeles county announced a ban on gatherings of people from different households under a new "safer-at-home order" to battle the surging pandemic.

Persistently high case numbers in many western countries loom over governments' hopes of easing their virus rules for Christmas and New Year.

The holidays would be a longed-for respite before bracing for what the world hopes is one last wave of restrictions until a clutch of promising new vaccines kick in.

Europe on Saturday crossed a grim barrier, registering 400,649 deaths according to an AFP tally at 0800 GMT.

Britain, where police arrested over 60 people during a protest in London against virus restrictions, accounted for almost two-thirds of the fatalities with 57,551, followed by Italy (53,677), France (51,914) and Spain (44,668).

Stores began lifting their shutters in France on Saturday, while Poland's shopping centres will also reopen.

"I'd rather avoid the internet, I'm going to buy things in the shops. They need it," said Anne Dubois, one of the first customers applauded through the doors by staff at Paris' vast Galeries Lafayette department store as it opened at 10:00 am.



Customers queued outside a furniture store in southeastern France as shops were allowed to lift their shutters for the holiday season

"Whether or not there's people here, at least we've got our daily life getting back to normal," said 36-year-old Aurelie, a manager in the L'Oreal section at Galeries Lafayette.

Belgium will allow shops to reopen from December 1, but keep the current semi-lockdown in place possibly until mid-January. The move mirrors similar easing in Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

Ireland has also announced a staggered easing of restrictions to allow some businesses to reopen and for families to gather ahead of Christmas.

'Long winter months ahead'

Germany, once a beacon of hope in Europe's [coronavirus](#) nightmare, logged more than one million cases on Friday.

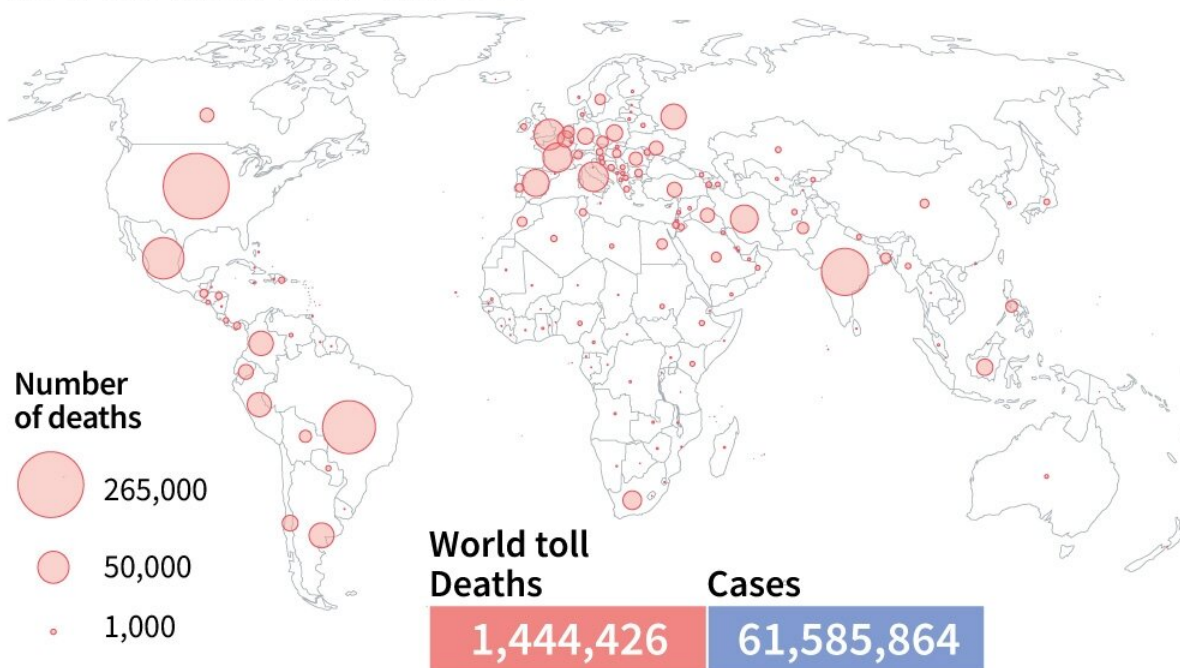
Although the virus spread is slowing thanks to weeks of tough restrictions, Europe remains at the heart of the pandemic, recording more cases than the United States in the past week.

Germany's Robert Koch Institute recorded more than 22,000 new daily cases on Friday, pushing the overall total in the country beyond the one-million mark.

More worryingly, the number of Covid-19 patients in intensive care has soared from around 360 in early October to more than 3,500 last week.

Spread of coronavirus

As of November 28 at 1100 GMT



Source: AFP tallies based on official tolls



World map showing the number of Covid-19 deaths by country, as of November 28 at 1100 GMT

Germans still have "three or four long winter months ahead", Economy Minister Peter Altmaier told Die Welt daily on Saturday, warning that "it's possible the restrictions will be maintained into the first months of 2021".

Meanwhile in the French Alps, demonstrations were held over the shutting of ski slopes, restaurants and bars over the holiday season.

Police said 400 people gathered in the Alpine town of Gap, while

organisers put that number at 2,000.

"Without the opening of the lifts and shops, the resorts will be dead... It represents almost 40 percent of the economy of the whole mountain," restaurant owner Cedric Manzoni told AFP.

LA restrictions

The United States surpassed 13 million total cases on Friday—the world's highest figure—and officials were concerned whether gatherings on Thursday for the Thanksgiving holiday would further worsen the situation.

The virus clouded the traditional "Black Friday" shopping day for brick-and-mortar stores, but Americans are estimated to have spent up to \$10 billion online, tech company Adobe said based on its analytics.

Throughout the [holiday season](#), "we expect record online sales as many consumers opt to shop online to avoid stores because of the unknown around COVID-19," said Adobe marketing chief John Copeland.



A health worker checks the temperature of a voter in India's Kashmir state

Worry over the virus's rapid spread led Los Angeles county to announce a temporary ban on gatherings of people from different households, with religious services and protests exempt.

The order affecting the United States' second-largest city will take effect Monday and last at least three weeks, until December 20, the county's public health department said.

Lockdown fatigue

The pandemic is spreading fastest in Asia and Latin America, and is up

by a worrying 113 percent over the week in Mexico.

Globally, more than 1.4 million deaths and 61 million infections have been officially recorded, although the real numbers are unknown since testing and reporting methods vary greatly.

Lockdown fatigue is spreading even as governments unfurl new measures to save healthcare systems from collapse.

One hairdresser in northern England has become a cause celebre among social media libertarians after stacking up fines totalling £17,000 (\$23,000, 19,000 euros), invoking the Magna Carta of 1215.

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