Europe has half of world's 4M new virus cases but sees hope

November 18 2020, by Jamey Keaten

Police officers block a road between the Brandenburg Gate and the Reichstag building, home of the German federal parliament, as people attend a protest rally in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, Germany, Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 against the coronavirus restrictions in Germany. Police in Berlin have requested thousands of reinforcements from other parts of Germany to cope with planned protests by people opposed to coronavirus restrictions. (AP Photo/Michael Sohn)

Europe made up almost half of the world's 4 million new coronavirus cases last week but recorded a nearly 10% fall in infections compared to the week before, thanks in part to strict government lockdown measures that have fanned some discontent, the World Health Organization reported Wednesday.

In the German capital of Berlin, violent clashes between those protesting coronavirus restrictions and police erupted Wednesday near the city center after protesters disregarded police advice to wear masks and social distance.

The latest weekly tally from the U.N. health agency found its 54-nation European region continued to report most new cases of any region worldwide—46%—but its decline in cases followed "the strengthening of public health and social measures." But as new cases fell, the tally of virus deaths still rose "substantially" in Europe over the last week to more than 29,000 new deaths, WHO said.

WHO's Americas region saw a 41% increase in new cases, suggesting that a higher weekly death toll could soon follow there. Southeast Asia was the only region that saw a drop in cases and deaths.

In Europe, WHO said the sharpest rise in coronavirus cases was in Austria, which saw a 30% increase in new cases compared to the previous week. WHO also noted the U.K. was the first country in the region to record more than 50,000 deaths.

Police uses water canons to clear a blocked a road between the Brandenburg Gate and the Reichstag building, home of the German federal parliament, as people attend a protest rally in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, Germany, Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 against the coronavirus restrictions in Germany. Police in Berlin have requested thousands of reinforcements from other parts of Germany to cope with planned protests by people opposed to coronavirus restrictions. (AP Photo/Michael Sohn)

Pockets of Western Europe have shown signs of turning a corner, particularly in the lowlands near the English Channel.

Belgium said Wednesday it had taken a major step in containing the resurgence of the coronavirus, reporting a drop in the daily death count for the first time since the latest COVID-19 wave hit this autumn.

Virologist Steven Van Gucht, from the government's Sciensano health group, said Belgium's daily average of virus deaths now stood at 185, a 5% decrease compared to the average a week ago. Over the last week, the daily average of hospital admissions dropped 24% and new infections fell 39%.

Officials in the Netherlands, to the north, were easing coronavirus restrictions amid falling infection rates, and were poised to reopen venues like cinemas, museums, libraries, zoos and swimming pools—still with limitations on how many people can visit—after a two-week closure.

A medical operator prepares to perform COVID-19 test swabs in the Church of San Severo Outside the Walls, in the heart of Naples, Italy, Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020. An initiative of "Sanita' Diritti Salute" association and the San Gennaro

Foundation, aimed at helping those who cannot afford the cost of a private test, also allows, in the best tradition of Naples, those who want to pay 18 euros for a "suspended swab", to be taken by somebody else, exactly as it happens for the famous Neapolitan "suspended coffee". (Alessandro Pone /LaPresse via AP)

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte hailed a "positive" downward trend but said case counts were still too high. He warned the country to remain on a partial lockdown. In mid-October, Dutch rates of infection were among the worst in Europe.

Switzerland, which has registered some of the highest transmission rates in the world in recent weeks, on Wednesday stepped up [government support](link) to help people affected by the virus and by lockdown measures—including a extra 1 billion Swiss francs in state aid—even as case counts eased back from recent peaks.

The Alpine country counted over 6,000 new cases over the last day, down from a peak of more than 10,000 daily cases in October. Economic Affairs Minister Guy Parmelin cited a "more optimistic horizon" in Switzerland on Wednesday.

Regional officials in Geneva noted a "plateau" in positive COVID-19 tests in recent days and on Wednesday eased some restrictions on hairdressers, tattoo parlors, therapists and personal trainers, among others.

A police person wears a face mask under a helmet after beeing hit by a water canon during a violent protest ralley in a road between the Brandenburg Gate and the Reichstag building, home of the German federal parliament, in Berlin, Germany, Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 against the coronavirus restrictions in Germany. Police in Berlin have requested thousands of reinforcements from other parts of Germany to cope with planned protests by people opposed to coronavirus restrictions. (AP Photo/Michael Sohn)

Meanwhile, some people in Germany were growing increasingly restive about the prospect of increased lockdown measures.

In Berlin, police fired water cannons Wednesday at demonstrators and carried away some who were protesting coronavirus restrictions near the

famed Brandenburg Gate and the seat of the federal government. The melee erupted after crowds ignored calls to wear masks and keep their distance from one another in line with pandemic rules.

It came as German lawmakers were debating a bill that could provide the legal groundwork for the government to issue social distancing rules, require masks in public and close stores and other venues to slow the spread of the virus. Most people in Germany support such rules, but a vocal minority has staged regular rallies arguing that the restrictions violate the constitution.

A man in protective suit stands next to a mobile COVID-19 testing kiosk outside the Ernakulam district administration headquarters in Kochi, Kerala state, India, Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020. A country of nearly 1.4 billion people, India is the world's second most coronavirus affected country after the United States. (AP

Photo/R S Iyer)

German Chancellor Angela Merkel attends a meeting of the German federal parliament, Bundestag, at the Reichstag building in Berlin, Germany, Wednesday, Nov. 8, 2020. German lawmakers attend a debate on a bill that will provide the legal underpinning for the government to issue social distancing rules, require masks in public and close stores and other venues to slow the spread of the virus. (Michael Kappeler/dpa via AP)

A protestor shouts as police officers block a road between the Brandenburg Gate and the Reichstag building, home of the German federal parliament, as people attend a protest rally in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, Germany, Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 against the coronavirus restrictions in Germany. Police in Berlin have requested thousands of reinforcements from other parts of Germany to cope with planned protests by people opposed to coronavirus restrictions. (AP Photo/Michael Sohn)

A medical operator performs COVID-19 test swabs in the Church of San Severo Outside the Walls, in the heart of Naples, Italy, Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020. An initiative of "Sanita' Diritti Salute" association and the San Gennaro Foundation, aimed at helping those who cannot afford the cost of a private test, also allows, in the best tradition of Naples, those who want to pay 18 euros for a "suspended swab", to be taken by somebody else, exactly as it happens for the famous Neapolitan "suspended coffee". (Alessandro Pone /LaPresse via AP)

A protestor lifts her hands as police officers block a road between the Brandenburg Gate and the Reichstag building, home of the German federal parliament, as people attend a protest rally in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, Germany, Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020 against the coronavirus restrictions in Germany. Police in Berlin have requested thousands of reinforcements from other parts of Germany to cope with planned protests by people opposed to coronavirus restrictions. (AP Photo/Michael Sohn)

"We want our lives back," read one sign carried by protesters in Berlin.

Germany was praised for its handling of the first wave of the virus, but like many parts of Europe has seen a sharp uptick in new infections in recent weeks. Overall the country has seen 833,000 coronavirus cases and more than 13,000 virus-confirmed deaths, a death toll one-fourth that of Britain's.

Europe has seen over 338,000 confirmed virus deaths in the pandemic, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University.

Citation: Europe has half of world's 4M new virus cases but sees hope (2020, November 18) retrieved 11 May 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-11-europe-world-4m-virus-cases.html