

Italian regions latest to enter lockdown as virus grips Europe

November 6 2020, by Afp Bureaus



Empty cafes in Italy as large parts of the country return to lockdown

Swathes of Italy return to coronavirus lockdown Friday as the resurgent pandemic continued its march through Europe and reached record levels in the United States.

Five coronavirus "red zones" in Italy's north—plus Calabria in the country's "toe"—will shutter non-essential businesses, affecting 16 million people.

America recorded a third day in a row with deaths above 1,000, while more than 120,000 infections were uncovered—smashing a daily record set the day before, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University.

Italy had been badly hit by a first wave, with images of swamped hospitals, makeshift morgues and intubated patients shocking the world.

Experts say the country is now in the grip of a second wave after a sharp uptick in contagion numbers, and regions are again warning that intensive care units are filling rapidly.

Another 445 new coronavirus deaths were recorded across the country on Thursday, along with 34,505 new cases.

In Italy's financial and fashion capital of Milan, streets have already fallen quiet. "My customers are very scared, very scared," hairdresser Francesco Puccio told AFP.

"Last week I only had two clients per day, sometimes even just one, so there's no real advantage for me in staying open. There's nobody out and about anymore, the offices are empty," he said.



A man in a coronavirus mask rides along a street in New Delhi

'Completely dead now'

Italy's regions follow 56 million people in England who went into a second lockdown on Thursday.

Tourist destinations such as London's Buckingham Palace and Trafalgar Square were deserted, and normally bustling cities including Manchester and Liverpool fell quiet.

"It's completely dead now," Maria Belkihel, 42, told AFP in London's best-known shopping spot, Oxford Street.

In Denmark, 280,000 people were restricted in the country's northwest after a mutated version of the new coronavirus linked to mink farms was found in humans.

Denmark—the world's largest exporter of mink fur—had earlier said it would cull all of its 15-17 million minks.

While not more severe than the normal virus, the mutated version "could pose a risk that future vaccines won't work", Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said.

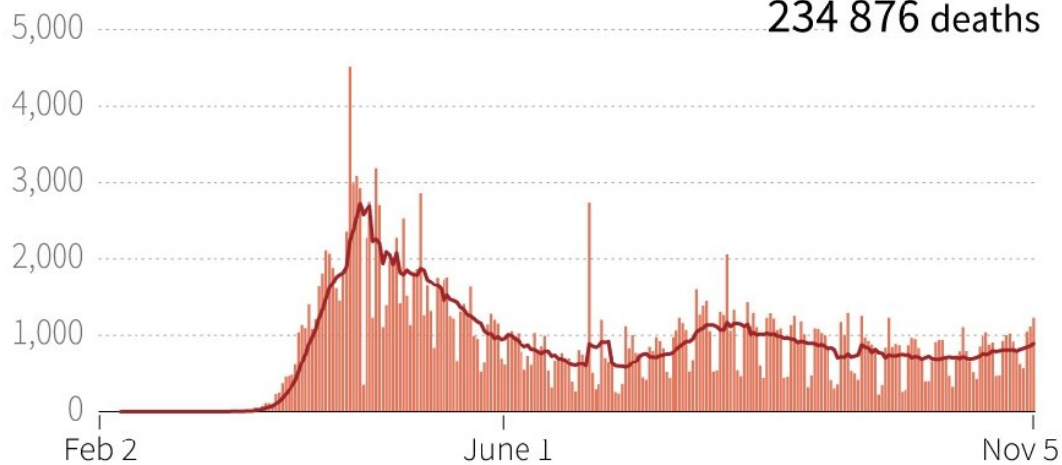
Covid-19 in the United States

Confirmed cases and deaths by day
with 7-day rolling average

9 600 324 cases



234 876 deaths



Source: Johns Hopkins University



Covid-19 cases and deaths in the United States

The WHO's regional director for Europe Hans Kluge said there had been a COVID-19 "explosion" on the continent as its 11.6 infections surge past Latin America and the Caribbean's 11.4 million.

"We do see an explosion... in the sense it only takes a couple of days to have over the European region an increase of one million cases," he told AFP.



Police officers hold down a protester during a rally against coronavirus restrictions in Ljubljana, Slovenia

'Find another solution'

France locked down last week, and the mayor of Paris announced Thursday that stores selling alcohol and food to late-night shoppers will be forced to close at 10 pm to "avoid gatherings".

France recorded 58,046 new cases on Thursday as some prominent doctors warned the lockdown, which allows schools to stay open, will not be enough.

In Sweden—which has famously refused the mandatory lockdowns seen elsewhere in Europe—Prime Minister Stefan Lofven said he had gone into self-isolation after being in the "vicinity" of someone with COVID-19.



A woman walks by a closed restaurant in France during a second lockdown

Greece will go back into lockdown from Saturday for three weeks to

battle a second wave of the coronavirus, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis announced.

Across Europe and beyond the virus flare-up has brought with it fears about what new lockdowns mean for jobs and already battered businesses.

"The situation hasn't changed, we need to find another solution (to [lockdown](#))," said kiosk owner Nicola Bilotta, 56, in Milan.

The Bank of England on Thursday unveiled an extra £150 billion (\$195 billion) in cash stimulus and forecast a deeper [coronavirus](#)-induced recession.

In the election-fixated United States, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said more emergency spending will be "essential" to support the economy.

The recent spike in COVID-19 cases is "particularly concerning", Powell told reporters.

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Citation: Italian regions latest to enter lockdown as virus grips Europe (2020, November 6) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-11-italian-regions-latest-lockdown-virus.html>

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