

Italy shuts down 4 regions as Europe tries lighter lockdowns

November 6 2020, by Colleen Barry



Pigeons gather in an almost deserted Duomo square, in downtown Milan, Italy, Friday, Nov. 6, 2020. Lombardy is among the four Italian regions classified as red zones, where a strict lockdown was imposed starting Friday - to be reassessed in two weeks - in an effort to curb the COVID-19 infections growing curve. Starting today, only shops selling food and other essentials are allowed to open. (Claudio Furlan/LaPresse via AP)

Luxury fashion boutiques, jewelry shops and most of Milan's flagship department stores were shuttered Friday, as the center of Italy's vibrant financial capital fell into a gray quiet on the first day of a partial lockdown in four regions aimed at stopping the coronavirus's resurgence.

The new restrictions—which led to closures of a patchwork of nonessential businesses—allow a great deal more freedom than Italy's near-total 10-week lockdown that started in March, but nonetheless brought recriminations from regional governments that feel unfairly targeted. In particular, the south, which was largely spared in the spring, chafed the most, despite concerns that its weaker health care system was especially vulnerable.

Italy's move echoes those in many parts of Europe, where infections are rising again, but governments have been reluctant to impose the kind of nationwide shutdowns they did in the spring because of the terrible economic damage they did. For instance, many European countries have opted to keep schools open—making work easier for parents—while shutting bars and restaurants and many shops.

Even the lighter restrictions this time around, however, are drawing stiff criticism—especially in countries like Britain and Italy where they have exacerbated regional tensions.

Under Italy's complicated 21-point formula, the northern regions of Lombardy, Piedmont and Valle d'Aosta and the southern region of Calabria, the toe of Italy's boot, faced increased restrictions for the next 15 days, including the closure of all nonessential stores, take-out only for bars and restaurants, distance learning for students 12 and over and a ban on leaving hometowns except for work, health or other serious reasons.



A man wearing a face mask to curb the spread of the new coronavirus walks past a closed cafe, in Turin, northern Italy, Friday, Nov. 6, 2020. Piedmont is among the four Italian regions classified as red zones, where a strict lockdown was imposed starting Friday - to be reassessed in two weeks - in an effort to curb the COVID-19 infections growing curve. From today, bars and restaurants can only work with take-away customers. (Nicolo' Campo/LaPresse via AP)

Sicily and Puglia, two other southern regions, fell into a second tier of restrictions, while the rest of the country maintained more freedom of movement but with a 10 p.m. curfew and restaurants closings at 6 p.m.

In Rome, Italy's health minister faced Parliament to defend the government's handling of the new phase of the crisis amid concerns the government has too often bypassed lawmakers during the pandemic.

"In a great country like Italy, this cannot be the field of a political battle," Roberto Speranza said, noting that the criteria being applied had been in place since April without dissent. "I say this with all my strength and from my heart: Enough. Don't fuel polemics."

Speranza said the lockdowns were a necessity as the number of confirmed infections skyrockets and deaths reach highs not seen since the spring.



Taxi drivers stage a protest against limitations and the curfew imposed by the government in the effort to curb COVID-19 spread, in Rome Friday, Nov. 6, 2020. (AP Photo/Andrew Medichini)

The restrictions took effect the day Italy hit a new all-time high of single-day confirmed infections—37,809—and registered the highest number of deaths—446—since spring. Lombardy's latest caseload surged to nearly 10,000, accounting for more than 25% of Italy's new confirmed infections on Friday.

"Maybe people are getting used to seeing 400 dead. That number would have people petrified in front of their TV sets. Now people seem more indifferent," Luca Zerbini, a lawyer drinking a take-out cup of coffee near the Duomo cathedral.

In Calabria, the governor vowed to fight the restrictions. And some mayors in the Lombardy in cities that suffered in the first lockdown but are less hard-hit now have pushed for restrictions to vary by province and not by the larger category of region.

Milan's mayor, Giuseppe Sala, rejected such differential treatment within regions, which share a common health care system. "I invite Milanese to stay home as much as possible in these very difficult days," Sala said Friday.



Women wearing face masks as a precaution against the coronavirus walk through the Tuileries garden in Paris, Friday, Nov. 6, 2020. The French government is supplying quick virus tests to nursing homes around the country, amid sharply rising numbers of virus infections and deaths in care homes in recent weeks. Arc de Triomphe and Obelisk in the background. (AP Photos/Michel Euler)

All was quiet in the city, where even the lines that usually form in front of popular takeaway sandwich shops—still allowed to be open—were nowhere to be seen. The hodgepodge of shops considered "necessary" includes hairdressers, cosmetic and perfume stores, florists, and sweet shops alongside grocery stores—but not ice cream parlors or pastry shops. That created the odd situation where the flagship Rinascente department store was open only to customers wanting to access the

ground floor for cosmetics, the 7th-floor food court or the penthouse hair salon.

That patchwork reflects efforts to balance slowing the virus's spread with protecting the battered economy—and it can be seen across Europe. Many fear that businesses that suffered in the spring won't survive new restrictions this time around.

In France, bookshops have been shut, and Paris' landmark English-language store Shakespeare and Company appealed to readers for support. And it got it, receiving 5,000 online orders in one week, compared with the usual 100.



A woman wearing a face covering walks past an advertising window of a closed shop in London, Friday, Nov. 6, 2020. Britain's lockdown started Thursday, shuttering restaurants, hairdressers and clothing stores until at least Dec. 2. (AP Photo/Frank Augstein)

But even as politicians keep a wary eye on the economy, they are also concerned about pressure on their strained health systems.

Luca Zaia, governor of the northern Italian region of Veneto region, said that the deaths in his region were mostly among people over 70 while most infections were among the young, underlining the necessity for people to observe new rules even in one of the regions with the lightest restrictions.

"We are entering the most critical phase," Zaia said, noting that if the situation worsens they will have to halt other medical procedures to find beds for COVID-19 patients.

Germany's health minister has warned of hard times ahead unless the country can "break" the rising trajectory of coronavirus cases, which has doubled the number of patients in intensive care in just 10 days and set a new record of over 21,500 new confirmed cases on Friday.



A man gets on a suburban train in the main station in Frankfurt, Germany, Friday, Nov. 6, 2020. The managing director of the Rhein-Main-Verkehrsverbund (RMV) expects a loss of revenue of about 250 million euros this year as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. (Andreas Arnold/dpa via AP)



Women wearing face masks as a precaution against the coronavirus walks at the rue Rivoli in Paris, Friday, Nov. 6, 2020. The French government is supplying quick virus tests to nursing homes around the country, amid sharply rising numbers of virus infections and deaths in care homes in recent weeks. (AP Photos/Michel Euler)



A passerby and shops shutters are reflected on a closed restaurant window in Rome, Friday, Nov. 6, 2020. Italy recorded a new daily record of confirmed coronavirus cases at 34,505 and the highest number of victims, at 428, since May as health authorities defended new regional lockdowns aimed at taming the COVID-19 surge. (AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia)



A couple kiss each other in Athens, Friday, Nov. 6, 2020. With a surge in coronavirus cases straining health systems in many European countries, Greece announced a nationwide lockdown. The lockdown takes effect at daybreak on Saturday across the country and will last until the end of the month. (AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis)



Taxi drivers stage a protest against limitations and the curfew imposed by the government in the effort to curb COVID-19 spread, in Rome Friday, Nov. 6, 2020. (AP Photo/Andrew Medichini)



Bar owner Franco Epifani and his wife Camilla De Leonardis deliver coffee to customers outside their bistrot bar, at the Isola district, in Milan, Italy, Friday, Nov. 6, 2020. Lombardy is among the four Italian regions classified as red zones, where a strict lockdown was imposed starting Friday - to be reassessed in two weeks - in an effort to curb the COVID-19 infections growing curve. From today, bars and restaurants can only work with take-away customers. (AP Photo/Luca Bruno)



Geraldo, a barber, plays his guitar while waiting for customers, wearing a face mask to protect against the spread of coronavirus in his small hairdresser premises in Madrid, Spain, Friday, Nov. 6, 2020. Restrictions are in force across the country as authorities try to contain a sharp resurgence of reported coronavirus cases but are refraining from a full lockdown to try to prevent further economic deterioration. (AP Photo/Paul White)



Doctors perform a tracheostomy on a COVID-19 patient in critical care in Barcelona's Hospital del Mar the Intensive Care Unit, Spain, Thursday, Nov. 5, 2020. Some hospitals in Spain say they are only now beginning to feel some relief following a series of virus restrictions imposed some two weeks ago across the Iberian nation but warn that ICUs are still under huge pressure with a high number of COVID patients. (AP Photo/Emilio Morenatti)



A nearly empty Carnaby Street in London, Friday, Nov. 6, 2020. Britain's lockdown started Thursday, shuttering restaurants, hairdressers and clothing stores until at least Dec. 2. (AP Photo/Frank Augstein)



A protective face mask washes up on the beach in Zeebrugge, Belgium, Thursday, Nov. 5, 2020. With more people not disposing of protective face masks properly, many are ending up on beaches, walking paths and streets in Belgium. (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo)



Nurse Viviana takes off her protective suit after finishing a round tending to COVID-19 patients inside negative pressure rooms at the Curry Cabral hospital in Lisbon, Thursday, Nov. 5, 2020. Portugal is setting grim milestones in its fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, with authorities reporting Wednesday a record number of new daily cases, deaths and patients in intensive care. (AP Photo/Armando Franca)

And the French government is supplying quick virus tests to nursing homes around the country and to the nation's biggest airport, Paris' Charles de Gaulle. The tests are cheap and fast, but experts say they are also less accurate than the standard ones. Nursing homes in France, Spain and other European countries saw tremendous numbers of deaths in the first surge.

"The second wave is here, and it is violent," French Health Minister Olivier Veran warned Thursday night, while urging people to respect a partial national lockdown.

In Denmark, meanwhile, more than a quarter-million people were put on lockdown in a northern region where a mutated variation of the coronavirus infected a mink farm. Although there was no evidence the mutation posed a threat to people, Danish authorities were taking no chances and ordered millions of the animals to be killed.

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