

LA shuts restaurants as virus surges, but Europe eases lockdowns

November 25 2020



A health worker takes a patient's temperature before their test in Los Angeles, California

A restaurant dining ban in Los Angeles was due to come into force Wednesday as officials warned Americans to stay home for the

Thanksgiving holiday, while parts of Europe eyed looser coronavirus lockdowns over the festive season.

The three-week order in America's second-biggest city will begin as California faces record COVID-19 cases, and its health secretary urged people to avoid large family gatherings.

"It's as important to say 'no' even when it comes to the closest people in our family," doctor Mark Ghaly said, adding he had barred his mother from a planned celebration.

The US government's health protection agency has, for the first time, called on Americans not to travel for an annual holiday which usually sees families get together over turkey, yams and cranberry sauce.

With the US confronted by soaring numbers of deaths and new cases, plans to deliver a vaccine to Americans are accelerating.

More than six million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine will be available in the first week after it is cleared for emergency use—which is likely next month—and 40 million by the end of December, according to officials.

There were more than 86,000 coronavirus hospitalizations in the US on Tuesday, a record, as well as 167,000 new cases and more than 2,000 deaths.

As America grappled with its crisis, some European nations were slowly relaxing measures ahead of their own Christmas holidays, as a second wave of infections slowed following weeks of lockdowns.

Covid-19: Total deaths vs deaths per million

As of November 24

Highest number

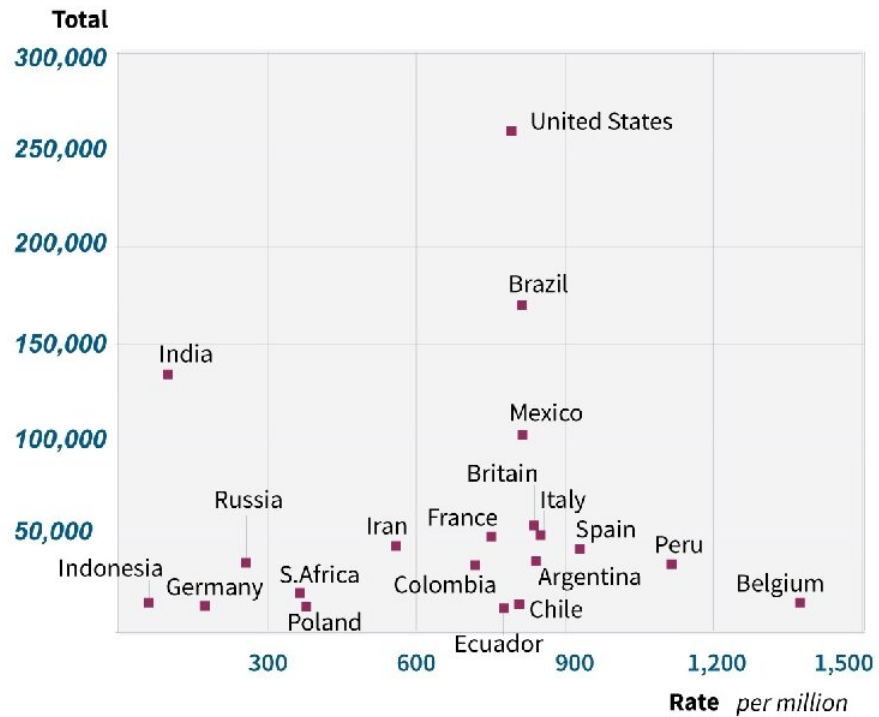
Total deaths


US	259,800+
Brazil	170,100+
India	134,200+
Mexico	102,700+
Britain	55,800+
Italy	51,300+
France	50,300+
Iran	45,700+
Spain	43,600+
Argentina	37,400+

Rates, selected countries

Per million

Belgium	1,375
Peru	1,115
Spain	930
Italy	850
Argentina	841
Britain	838
Mexico	814
Brazil	812
Chile	808
US	792
Bolivia	785
Ecuador	777



Source: AFP database 

Graphic looking at countries with the highest coronavirus death tolls, and their respective death rates.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen warned, however, against easing restrictions too quickly.

"We must learn from the summer and not repeat the same mistakes, relaxing too fast," she said Wednesday.

In a televised address, French President Emmanuel Macron announced shops could re-open from Saturday, and nationwide stay-at-home orders would be lifted from December 15.

British authorities also announced restrictions on social mixing and said travel would be eased across the UK over Christmas.

Mixed signals in Asia

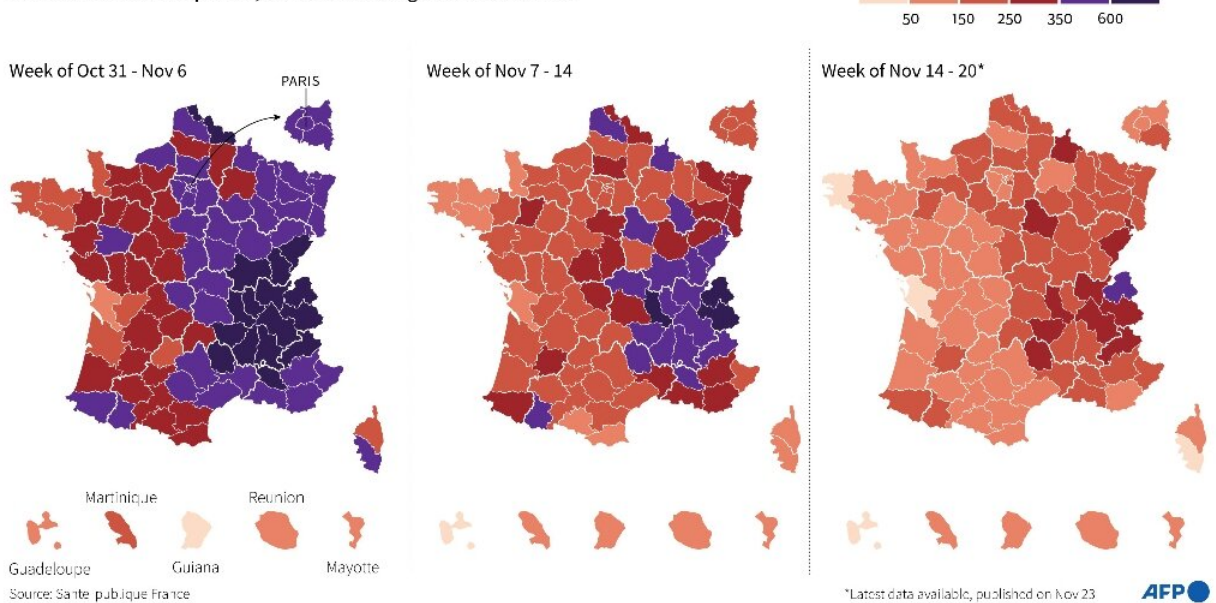
Elsewhere in Europe, 16 German states agreed to slightly loosen limits on social contact over Christmas, according to a draft deal seen by AFP, even as cases near one million there.

State leaders agreed to cap gatherings to 10 people over the December 23 to January 1 holiday—double the limit for the rest of December.

In Australia, the country's most populous state, New South Wales, eased social distancing measures and allowed employees back to work, Premier Gladys Berejiklian announced Wednesday, after three weeks without a locally transmitted COVID-19 case.

Coronavirus infection rate falls in France

New cases of Covid-19 per 100,000 inhabitants registered over 1 week



Maps showing Covid-19 infection rate per French department over the past 3 weeks

Singapore, which has one of the world's lowest virus death rates, announced it had no live clusters of COVID-19 cases in the country—the first time since its outbreak began earlier this year.

And in more positive news, China recorded just five new coronavirus cases on Tuesday—all imported, authorities said on Wednesday.

The encouraging signs in Asia have been tempered by a second wave in Pakistan, where intensive care units were nearing capacity and hospitals forced to turn away suspected COVID-19 patients.

"The coming two weeks are critical and our situation is going to worsen," said Qaisar Sajjad, secretary-general of the Pakistan Medical Association.

Parts of Japan have also been hit by a recent spike in cases, with experts saying a government travel subsidy campaign to help domestic tourism had contributed to the rise.

Tokyo residents were urged by the governor Wednesday to avoid non-essential outings and businesses serving alcohol asked to shut early.

Tempered optimism

There are now several possible vaccines internationally being trialled, with candidates from Moderna, AstraZeneca/Oxford University and Pfizer-BioNTech leading the pack.



Passengers wearing face masks walk to their train at the main railway station in Wuhan, China

Britain, France, Austria and Spain have pledged to begin vaccinations in early 2021 at the latest.

Even once a vaccine becomes available, however, any return to normality for a global economy ravaged by the pandemic seems a long way off.

Still, optimism sparked by the vaccines has given a boost to virus-weary citizens across the globe in recent days, as well as pushing up stock markets.

Asian markets rallied Wednesday following a blockbuster performance on Wall Street and easing US political uncertainty since Joe Biden's presidential election win boosted investor confidence.

More than 1.4 million people have died worldwide and the global caseload is edging towards 60 million, according to Johns Hopkins University.

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