

Paris doctors warn of catastrophic overload of virus cases

March 28 2021, by John Leicester and Jeffrey Schaeffer



In this March 19, 2021, file photo, a nurse tends to a patient affected by COVID-19 virus in the ICU unit at the Ambroise Pare clinic in Neuilly-sur-Seine, near Paris. France's president say he has nothing to be sorry about for refusing to impose a third virus lockdown earlier this year, even though his country is now facing surging infections that are straining hospitals and more than 1,000 people with the virus are dying every week. (AP Photo/Thibault Camus, File)

Critical care doctors in Paris say surging coronavirus infections could soon overwhelm their ability to care for the sick in the French capital's hospitals, possibly forcing them to choose which patients they have the resources to save.

The sobering warnings were delivered Sunday in newspaper opinions signed by dozens of Paris-region doctors. They came as French President Emmanuel Macron has been vigorously defending his decision not to completely lockdown France again as he did last year. Since January, Macron's government has instead imposed a nationwide overnight curfew and followed that with a grab-bag of other restrictions.

But with infections soaring and hospitals increasingly running short of intensive-care beds, doctors have been stepping up the pressure for a full French lockdown.

Writing in *Le Journal du Dimanche*, 41 Paris-region hospital doctors said: "We have never known such a situation, even during the worst (terror) attacks" that targeted the French capital, notably assaults by Islamic State extremists in 2015 that killed 130 people and filled Paris emergency wards with the wounded.

The doctors predicted that [softer new restrictions imposed this month](#) on Paris and some other regions won't quickly bring the resurgent epidemic under control. They warned that hospital resources won't be able to keep pace with needs, forcing them to practice "catastrophe medicine" in the coming weeks as cases peak.



A woman walks past a theater with signs showing it occupied by culture workers, actors students and theater employees in Bayonne, southwestern France, Friday, March 26, 2021. French theaters, cinemas, museums and tourist sites have been closed for much of the past year as part of government virus protection measures, and no reopening plans have been announced. (AP Photo/Bob Edme)

"We already know that our capacity to offer care will be overwhelmed," they wrote. "We will be obliged to triage patients in order to save as many lives as possible. This triage will concern all patients, with and without COVID, in particular for adult patients' access to critical care."

Another group of nine critical-care doctors writing in the newspaper *Le Monde* also warned that intensive care units in Paris may have to refuse

patients.

"The current situation is tending toward prioritization, also called 'triage,'" they wrote. "When just one ICU bed is available but two patients could benefit from it, it consists of deciding which of them will be admitted (and will perhaps survive) and which will not be admitted (and will quite probably die). This is where we are heading."

They also accused Macron's government of hypocrisy "by compelling health care workers to decide which patient should live and which should die, without stating so clearly."



In this March 19, 2021, file photo, a patient from the Paris region and affected by the COVID-19 virus is taken out a plane at the Biarritz's airport, southwestern

France. France's president say he has nothing to be sorry about for refusing to impose a third virus lockdown earlier this year, even though his country is now facing surging infections that are straining hospitals and more than 1,000 people with the virus are dying every week. (AP Photo/Bob Edme, File)

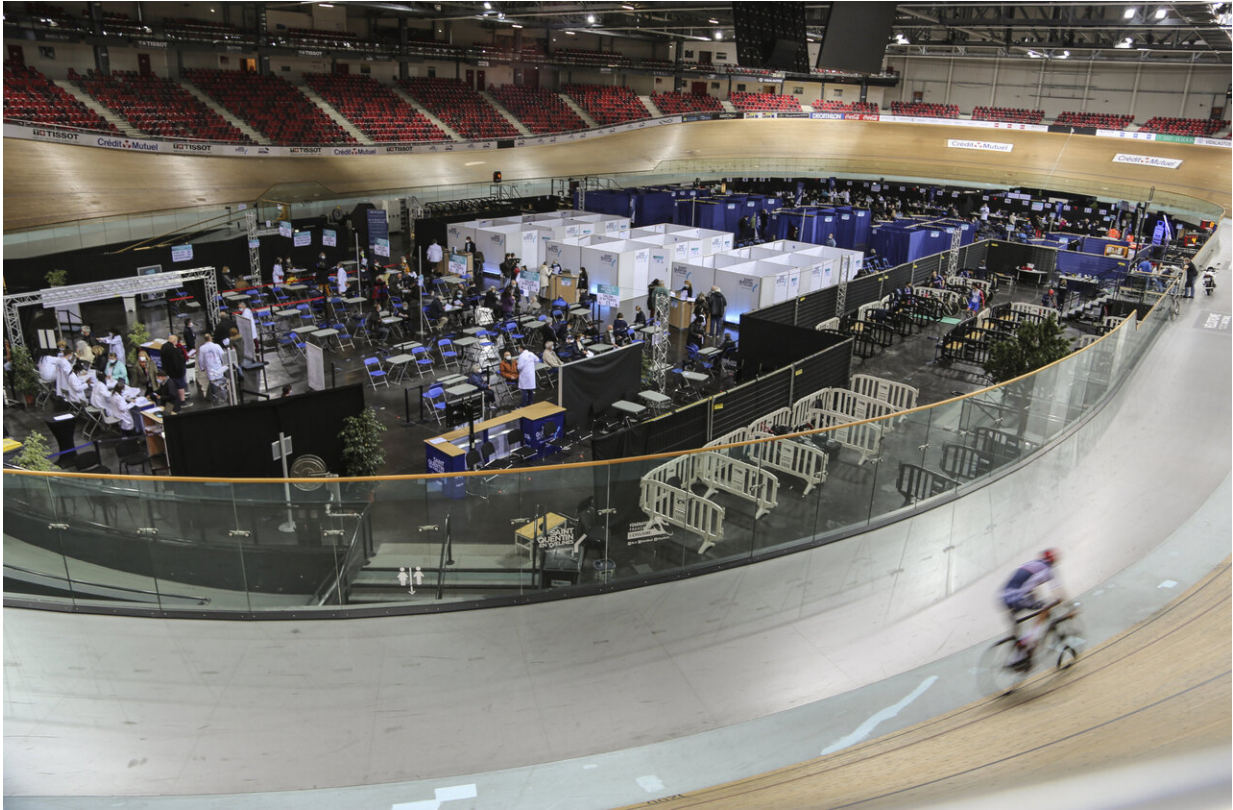
Macron remains adamant that not locking France down again this year, like some other European countries, was sound government policy, even as more than 2,000 deaths per week push the country ever closer to the milestone of 100,000 people lost to the pandemic. The country now counts more than 94,600 virus-related deaths.

"We were right not to implement a lockdown in France at the end of January because we didn't have the explosion of cases that every model predicted," Macron said last week. "There won't be a mea culpa from me. I don't have remorse and won't acknowledge failure."

Macron's administration has been hoping to outrace the resurgent outbreak with its vaccination campaign, an ambition that appears increasingly unrealistic as hospitals struggle. After a sluggish start in December, France's inoculation drive stepped up this weekend with the start of injections for healthy people aged 70 and above.



Riders train at the National Velodrome at Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, west of Paris, Saturday, March 27, 2021, that has been transformed into a mass vaccination center. Saturday marked the first day in France of vaccination for healthy people aged 70 and above. (AP Photo/John Leicester)



A riders trains at the National Velodrome at Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, west of Paris, Saturday, March 27, 2021, that has been transformed into a mass vaccination center. Saturday marked the first day in France of vaccination for healthy people aged 70 and above. (AP Photo/John Leicester)



Culture workers, actors, students, and theater employees attend a general assembly at the occupied Theatre de La Crie in Marseille, southern France, Friday, March 25, 2021. Out-of-work French culture and tourism workers are occupying theaters across France to demand more government support after a year of pandemic that has devastated their incomes and put their livelihoods on indefinite hold. (AP Photo/Daniel Cole)



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Culture workers, actors, students, and theater employees attend a general assembly at the occupied Theatre de La Crie in Marseille, southern France, Friday, March 25, 2021. Out-of-work French culture and tourism workers are occupying theaters accross France to demand more government support after a year of pandemic that has devastated their incomes and put their livelihoods on indefinite hold. (AP Photo/Daniel Cole)



A culture worker cooks food in a makeshift kitchen at the occupied Theatre de La Crie in Marseille, southern France, Friday, March 26, 2021. Out-of-work French culture and tourism workers are occupying theaters accross France to demand more government support after a year of pandemic that has devastated their incomes and put their livelihoods on indefinite hold. (AP Photo/Daniel Cole)



Culture workers sit together in the occupied Theatre de La Crie in Marseille, southern France, Friday, March 25, 2021. Out-of-work French culture and tourism workers are occupying theaters accross France to demand more government support after a year of pandemic that has devastated their incomes and put their livelihoods on indefinite hold. (AP Photo/Daniel Cole)



In this March, 19, 2021, file photo, medical staff meets in a room of a patient affected by COVID-19 virus in the ICU unit at the Ambroise Pare clinic in Neuilly-sur-Seine, near Paris. France's president say he has nothing to be sorry about for refusing to impose a third virus lockdown earlier this year, even though his country is now facing surging infections that are straining hospitals and more than 1,000 people with the virus are dying every week. (AP Photo/Thibault Camus, File)



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More than 7.7 million people—close to 15% of all French adults—have had at least one jab of either the Pfizer, Moderna or AstraZeneca vaccines. The government says the pace will continue to pick up, with France expecting to get nearly 3 million additional Pfizer doses this week.

The European Union's vaccine czar, Thierry Breton, told French radio

RTL on Sunday that the bloc will deliver 420 million vaccine doses to its member countries by July 15.

"The vaccines are coming," he said.

Breton also unveiled a mock-up of a proposed EU health certificate that could allow the bloc's residents to cross its internal borders more easily. The certificate shows if people have been vaccinated, tested negative for coronavirus or recovered from it. He said the certificate would be optional and could be available by mid-June.

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