

Coronavirus

Call for common tests

Europe, US face new round of shutdowns

NEW YORK, Oct 29, (AP): Germany on Wednesday moved to shut down restaurants, bars and theaters all over again and France weighed demands for another nationwide lockdown as a new wave of coronavirus infections in Europe and the US wipes out months of progress against the scourge on two continents.

The resurgence and the growing clampdown sent a shudder through financial markets, and stocks slumped.

"We must act, and now, to avoid an acute national health emergency," German Chancellor **Angela Merkel** said as she announced a four-week partial lockdown starting Monday.

French President Emmanuel Macron planned an address Wednesday night as many French doctors urged a nationwide lockdown, with 58% of the country's intensive care units now occupied by COVID-19 patients.

Countries such as Switzerland, Italy, Bulgaria and Greece have closed or otherwise clamped down again on bars and restaurants and imposed other restrictions such as curfews and mandatory mask-wearing. Both Italy and Germany set records for new infections Wednesday, with Italy reporting nearly 25,000 in a single day and Germany logging almost 15,000.

"We are deep in the second wave," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said. "I think that this year's Christmas will be a different Christmas."

In the U.S., where practically every state is seeing a rise in cases, Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker banned indoor dining and drinking in Chicago and limited the number of people gathering in one place.

"We can't ignore what is happening around us, because without action, this could look worse than anything we saw in the spring," he said.

The long-feared surge is blamed in part on growing disregard for social distancing and mask-wearing, as well as the onset of cold weather, which is forcing people indoors, where the virus can spread more easily.



Merkel

Success

After a devastatingly lethal spring, Europe seemed to have beaten back the virus over the summer. Its success was seen as a reproach to the United States and an example of what the US could accomplish if Americans would just stop their political infighting and listen to the scientists.

The S&P 500, the Dow Jones Industrial Average and the Nasdaq were all down in afternoon trading on Wall Street amid worries that fresh lockdowns and rollbacks of business will further drag down economies.

The virus is blamed for more than 250,000 deaths in Europe and about 227,000 in the US, according to the count kept by Johns Hopkins University.

More than 2 million new confirmed coronavirus cases have been reported globally in the past week, the World Health Organization said. That is the shortest time ever for such an increase. Forty-six percent of the new cases were reported in Europe.

Von der Leyen said Europe is being confronted with "two enemies."

"We're dealing with the coronavirus - the virus itself - and also corona fatigue," she said. "That is, people are becoming more and more fed up with the preventive measures."

In the US, more than 71,000 people a day are testing positive on average, up from 51,000 two weeks ago. Cases are on the rise in all but two states, Hawaii and Delaware, and deaths are climbing in 39 states, with an average of 805 people dying in the US per day, up from 714 two weeks ago.

Deaths are also on the rise in Europe, with about a 35% spike from the previous week, the WHO said. France reported 523 virus-related deaths in 24 hours Tuesday, the highest daily count since April.

Belgium, the Netherlands, most of Spain and the Czech Republic are seeing similarly high rates of infection.

In Italy, where the Lombardy and Campania regionals are hardest hit, officials have accused right-wing extremists, soccer hooligans and anarchists of using widespread malcontent over new anti-virus restrictions on restaurants, gyms, pools and theaters as a pretext to wage "urban guerrilla" violence during recent protests.

Talks of new lockdowns has also prompted unrest in Germany, where thousands staged a protest at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate to demand more financial support from the government.

Economists said further restrictions need to be carefully calibrated to avoid dealing a second severe blow to businesses.

"A national lockdown, as we have seen in, ravages an economy and would add significant complications to the ongoing economic recovery," said Fiona Cincotta, an analyst at online trading firm GAIN Capital.

But Thomas Gitzel, chief economist at Liechtenstein's VP Bank Group, said a short, strict lockdown could be effective and less harmful than a prolonged slump in consumer spending from persistently high infection levels.

"The strict containment measures in March and April laid the ground for an economically successful summer," he said.

Even Sweden, which avoided a national lockdown and generally imposed far lighter measures than other European countries, is now urging people to avoid stores and public transportation.

As European Union countries weigh tougher coronavirus restrictions, top EU officials on Wednesday urged the bloc's 27 nations to introduce common rules to test for the disease and track its spread to help prevent further damage to their economies.

European Council President Charles Michel, who will chair an extraordinary summit of EU leaders on Thursday evening focused on the pandemic, also urged them to prepare for logistical challenges likely to plague the rollout of any vaccines.

Infection

The World Health Organization said for the second consecutive week, the European region accounted for the biggest proportion of new infections, with more than 1.3 million cases or about 46% of the worldwide total. The UN health agency said deaths were also on the rise in Europe, with about a 35% spike since the previous week. WHO also noted that hospitalizations and ICU occupancy due to COVID-19 increased in 21 countries across Europe.

Across all of Europe, more than 250,000 virus-related deaths have been reported, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University.

France's president was addressing the nation Wednesday as the country braces for a possible lockdown to prevent hospitals being overwhelmed. Belgium, which has Europe's highest infection rate, is considering a similar move while German Chancellor Angela Merkel is pressing for a partial lockdown.

"We are in a storm. We are all in the same boat. And in this storm, we must keep cool heads," Michel told French radio RTL.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told reporters in Brussels that Europe is confronted "with two enemies at this time. We're dealing with the coronavirus; the virus itself and also corona fatigue. That is, people are becoming more and more fed up with the preventive measures."

The world's biggest trading bloc relies on free movement between its member states and the mutual recognition of each other's standards and laws to keep the EU economy alive. Michel said nations must coordinate their approval of new coronavirus tests and of tracing systems aimed at halting its spread.

He said he hoped that EU leaders "understand that if they each put in place their own national testing strategy without coordinating at a European level, without mutual recognition, then we will find ourselves back in the battles of the past."

As the pandemic spread through Europe in late February-March, countries bickered over access to face masks and medical equipment, while hasty border restrictions caused major traffic jams.



In this Sept 24, 2020, image released by SpaceX/NASA, NASA's SpaceX Crew-1 astronauts, (from left), mission specialist Shannon Walker, pilot Victor Glover, and Crew Dragon commander Michael Hopkins, all NASA astronauts, and mission specialist Soichi Noguchi, Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) astronaut, gesture during crew equipment interface testing at SpaceX headquarters in Hawthorne, Calif. SpaceX's second astronaut flight is off until mid-November 2020 because red lacquer dripped into tiny vent holes in two rocket engines that now must be replaced. (AP)

Red coating contaminates SpaceX rockets, delays crew launch

SpaceX's second astronaut flight is off until mid-November because red lacquer dripped into tiny vent holes in two rocket engines that now must be replaced.

SpaceX and NASA officials announced the discovery of the potentially damaging contamination Wednesday.

The clogged holes were found after the aborted launch of a GPS satellite on Oct 2. Two of those en-

gines were contaminated with the bright red coating, which protects engine parts during cleaning.

SpaceX later found the same problem with two of the nine booster engines on the rocket that will launch four astronauts to the International Space Station. It will be SpaceX's second launch of astronauts for NASA after a successful test flight earlier this year.

The engine trouble prompted SpaceX and NASA

to bump the launch to Nov 14, two weeks later than planned.

A company vice president, Hans Koenigsmann, said new procedures are being implemented to prevent the problem.

"The important part, I think, for us is that we caught it before anything happened," Koenigsmann told reporters. "Really important for us that we fix it ... and make sure that never happens again." (AP)



A doctor collects samples for coronavirus tests from residents in Subang on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on Oct 29. Malaysia extended restricted movements in its biggest city Kuala Lumpur, neighboring Selangor state and the administrative capital of Putrajaya from Wednesday in an attempt to curb a sharp rise in coronavirus cases. (AP)

Health

**820 virus cases in Japan:** Japan reported 820 new cases of the coronavirus over the last 24 hours as of 04:00 pm (0700 GMT) on Thursday, raising the nation's total number to 99,468, the health ministry and local authorities said.

The country's cumulative death toll rose by nine to 1,742.

Tokyo added 221 new infections, topping 200 for the first time in five days, which brought the total cases in the Japanese capital to 30,677.

The tallies exclude those who were linked to the virus-hit Diamond Princess Cruise ship in February.

Since Oct 1, Japan eased entry restrictions for foreigners from around the world, excluding tourists. (KUNA)

**'Virus under control':** Taiwan hit 200 days without any domestically transmitted cases of COVID-19 on Thursday, highlighting the island's continued success at keeping the virus under control even as cases surge in other parts of the world.

Taiwan's Center for Disease Control last reported a domestic case on April 12. CDC officials noted the milestone and thanked the public for playing a role, while urging people to continue to wear masks and to wash their hands often.

Since the pandemic began, Taiwan has recorded 553 cases of COVID-19, and just seven deaths. While it has stopped domestic transmission, it continues to record new cases in people arriving from abroad.

Taiwan has been pointed to as a success story in how to respond to the pandemic, especially considering its close business and tourism ties with China, where the virus first emerged late last year. (AP)

**India virus cases cross 8m:** India's confirmed coronavirus caseload surpassed 8 million on Thursday with daily infections dipping to the lowest level this week, as concerns grew over a major Hindu festival season and winter setting in.

India's trajectory is moving toward the worst-hit country, the United States, which has over 8.8 million cases.

The Health Ministry reported another 49,881 infections and 517 fatalities in the past 24 hours, raising the death toll to 120,527.

Coronavirus

UK vaccine chief warns of over-optimism

'First COVID vaccines may be imperfect'

Can virus travel more than 6 feet?

How does coronavirus affect heart?

LONDON, Oct 29, (AP): Warning that the first COVID-19 vaccines may be imperfect, the head of the UK effort to develop a vaccine called Wednesday for immediate international cooperation to prevent the "largest global recession in history."

UK Vaccine Taskforce chair Kate Bingham also warned against over-optimism, saying there is no guarantee a successful vaccine against the novel coronavirus will ever be developed.

"The first generation of vaccines is likely to be imperfect, and we should be prepared that they might not prevent infection, but rather reduce symptoms, and, even then, might not work for everyone or for long," Bingham wrote in an essay published in The Lancet medical journal.

Causes

No vaccine has ever been developed against any coronavirus, and numerous attempts to design vaccines against SARS and MERS, two which are related to the virus that causes COVID-19, have failed. Scientists also warn that immunity against coronaviruses appears to fade over time and that achieving any vaccine-induced immunity to protect against infection or severe disease could be challenging.

Bingham's comments come as government leaders in Britain and other countries are basing their COVID-19 strategies on expectations of a vaccine becoming available as soon as early next year.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson, for example, has implemented a three-tiered regional strategy aimed at slowing the spread of the disease until there is a vaccine while also minimizing the economic damage from another widespread lockdown.

Meanwhile, coronavirus cases, hospitalizations and deaths in the UK and elsewhere in Europe are rising amid a second wave of infections.

Britain created the Vaccine Taskforce earlier this year to speed the development of a vaccine. Two candidates are in late stage trials, with results expected around the end of the year or early 2021. Dozens of other potential vaccines are in earlier stages of development.

But Taskforce chair Bingham said the candidates that have progressed the most in testing are based on new approaches with little history of being used in vaccines. Vaccine candidates based on more frequently used methodologies aren't likely to be ready until late 2021, she added.

In addition, it will be a challenge to rapidly produce enough vaccines to

NEW YORK, Oct 29, (AP): Even though it's known as a respiratory virus, doctors believe the coronavirus can directly infect the heart muscle and cause other problems leading to heart damage.

In some people, as COVID-19 decreases lung function, it may deprive the heart of adequate oxygen. Sometimes it causes an overwhelming inflammatory reaction that taxes the heart as the body tries to fight off the infection.

The virus can also invade blood vessels or cause inflammation within them, leading to blood clots that can cause heart attacks.

Clots throughout the body have been found in many COVID-19 patients. That has led some doctors to try blood thinners, although there is no consensus on that treatment.

Dr. Sean Pinney of the University of Chicago says people with heart disease are most at risk for virus-related damage to the heart. But heart complications also have been found in COVID-19 patients with no known previous disease.

A recent review in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology notes that evidence of heart involvement has been found in at least 25% of hospitalized coronavirus patients. At some centers, the rate is 30% or higher. And some studies have found elevated enzyme levels and other signs suggesting heart damage even in patients with milder disease. It is not known whether that damage is permanent.

One small study found evidence of the virus in the hearts of COVID-19 patients who died from pneumonia. Another, using heart imaging, found inflammation of the heart muscle in four college athletes who had recovered

from mild COVID-19 infections. There were no images available from before the athletes got sick, and therefore no way to know if they had pre-existing heart problems.

Dr. Tom Maddox, an American College of Cardiology board member, says it's unclear if the virus can cause a normal heart to become dysfunctional.

"There's still so much we don't know," Maddox said.

Research indicates it can, but it's not clear how much of the pandemic is caused by such cases.

People spray liquid droplets of various sizes when they cough, sneeze, talk, sing, shout and even just breathe. The coronavirus can hitchhike on these particles.

The advice about staying at least 6 feet apart is based on the idea that the larger particles drop to the ground before getting very far.

But some scientists have also focused on tinier particles called aerosols. These can linger in the air for minutes to hours, and spread through a room and build up in concentration if ventilation is poor, posing a potential risk of infection if inhaled.

For aerosols, "6 feet is not a magic distance" and keeping even farther apart is better, says Linsey Marr, who researches airborne transmission of infectious diseases at Virginia Tech.

Some scientists say there's enough evidence about aerosols and the virus to take protective measures. In addition to the usual advice, they stress the need for ventilation and air-purifying systems when indoors. Even better, they say, is to stay outdoors when interacting with others.

combat the virus. The global manufacturing capacity is "vastly inadequate for the billions of doses that are needed," she wrote in The Lancet.

"China, Europe, the USA and the UK need to work together," Bingham wrote. "If we establish international collaboration right now, then we will be better prepared to control future pandemics without causing the largest global recession in history and the big-

gest threat to lives in living memory."

The World Health Organization says it hopes first-generation coronavirus vaccines will have an efficacy rate of at least 70%, but it has acknowledged that 50% might be more realistic. The European Medicines Agency has not specified any minimum efficacy threshold for COVID-19 vaccines and said they would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.



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John

and added more than 2 million in August and another 3 million in September. But it is seeing a slower pace of coronavirus spread since mid-September, when daily infections touched a record of 97,894 with the highest number of deaths at 1,275.

Dr. T. Jacob John, a retired virologist, said that in most parts of India the infection curve was never flattened and the number of people who are now susceptible to the virus had decreased. (AP)