

# Coronavirus latest: EU agrees to close external borders for 30 days

EU leaders have agreed to prevent foreigners from entering the European bloc for 30 days as they fight to contain the deadly coronavirus.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the proposal “got a lot of support by the member states. It’s up to them now to implement. They said they will immediately do that.”

At a press briefing on Tuesday night, Hans Henri P. Kluge, the World Health Organization’s regional director for Europe, said that 152 countries were now affected by COVID-19, creating a “new reality” for millions of people across the world.

“Europe is the epicenter of the first pandemic of coronavirus and every country, with no exceptions, need to take their boldest actions to stop or slow down the virus spread. Boldest action should include community action. Thinking that “this does not concern me” is not an option,” he said.

Italy now has nearly a third of the world’s deaths from coronavirus as Rome announced 345 more fatalities on Tuesday, taking the countries death toll to more than 2,500.

Global deaths from the outbreak – the epicenter of which has moved from China to Europe – are around 7,800.

Italy’s civil protection agency said there had been a further 3,500 new infections and that intensive care beds were full in Bergamo, a city in the worst-hit region of Lombardy.

Italy, which has the world’s second-oldest population after Japan, has been blindsided by a virus that appears to be deadlier for the elderly. The entire country remains on a strict lockdown, but it has so far failed to stem the flow of new infections.

France began its own lockdown on Tuesday, joining its neighbour Spain.

The UK – which saw 400 new cases in just 24 hours – has urged Britons to socially distance and stay away from bars, clubs, and restaurants. But, unlike some other European countries, they remain open, as do schools.

On Tuesday, the UK announced €360 billion in loans and credit to British businesses to protect them against any fallout from the coronavirus pandemic. Madrid announced its own €200 billion euro stimulus package.

The UK's health service said all “non-urgent elective surgery” would be suspended to increase capacity in hospitals for coronavirus infections.

In a speech to the nation on St Patrick's Day on Tuesday night, Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar warned that the current climate was “the calm before the storm, before the surge” and that he expected the restrictions on movement in Ireland last as long as the summer of 2020.

“Many of you want to know when this will be over; the truth is, we just don't know yet,” he said.

## **At a glance: Key coronavirus developments**

- **Globally, there has been around 7,800 COVID-19 deaths and 195,000 infections.**
- **EURO 2020 football tournament, set for June, put back to next year.**
- **Iranian state TV warns “”millions” could die if the public ignores health guidance.**
- **The UK confirms a surge in cases. Schools, restaurants and bars remain open.**
- **WHO urges countries to carry out more tests to break the chain of transmission**
- **Boris Johnson says the most vulnerable Britons should avoid social contact for three months**
- **Macron says “we are at war,” urging the country to remain at home for 15 days**
- **Wuhan, the central Chinese city where the virus was first detected,**

**reports just one new case on Tuesday.**

- **Latest figures on new infections and deaths**

## **The race for a vaccine**

Tests on an experimental vaccine to protect against the new coronavirus have begun in the United States, the first of many efforts around the world to create a vaccine as cases continue to grow. But experts warn it could take a year to 18 months to approve it.

Forty-five healthy adults between the ages of 18 and 55 will participate in the trial over six weeks. The first participant in the study received a dose on Monday.

The US National Institutes of Health is funding the trial, taking place at the Kaiser Permanente Washington Health Research Institute in Seattle.

In Europe, the EU announced a large investment in a German company, CureVac, which is working on a vaccine. The investment follows reports the US was looking to buy the company.

Helge Braun, Angela Merkel's chief of staff, told the German newspaper Bild that officials had "very intensive contact" with CureVac "when there were thoughts of enticing it to the United States".

"I am proud that we have leading companies like CureVac in the EU," said European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Germany's former defense minister, on Monday. "Their home is here, but their vaccines will benefit everyone, in Europe and beyond."

The Commission said it will provide up to €80 million in support.

## **EU plans to close borders**

EU leaders are to hold their second summit in two weeks in an attempt to forge a joint response, with Europe now the epicentre of the disease.

More than 50,000 people are confirmed to have contracted the virus in Europe, and more than 2,000 have died, the majority in Italy.

Spain and France have followed Italy in locking down to halt the spread, while several member states have reintroduced border ID checks

As of Monday, six of the 10 countries with the highest numbers of reported virus cases worldwide are in Europe: Italy, Spain, Germany, France, Switzerland and the UK.

For most people, the coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough, and they recover fully. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia.

## Effects of confinement appear to show some progress in Italy

Researchers at Oxford said that there were already seeing the effects of the lockdown in Lodi, which was enacted in late February.



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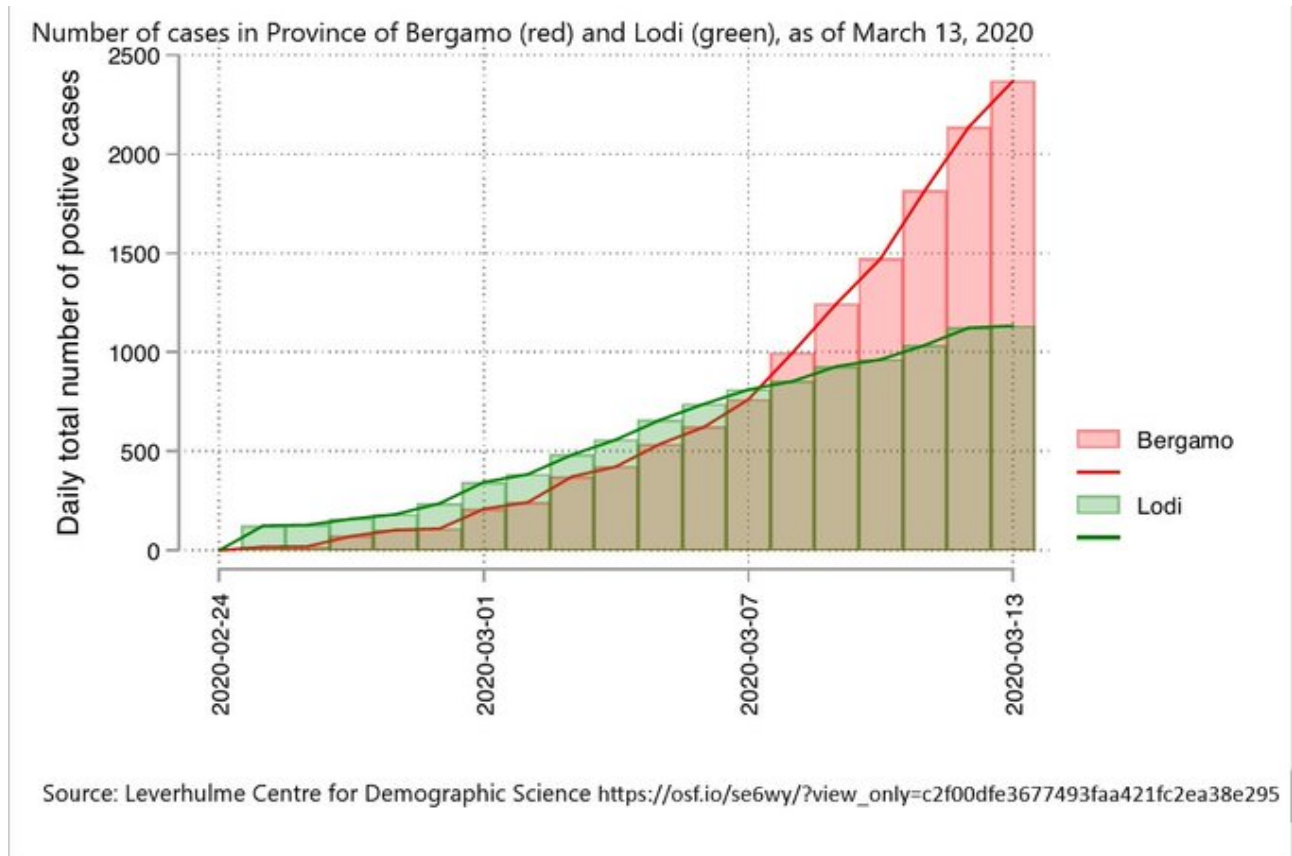
Replying to @drjenndowd

*7/12 High levels of intergenerational contact may also have put Italy more at risk, so the interaction of age structure and social contacts will also be important to predict local and national risk going forward. #soctwitter #poptwitter*



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*8/12 We find some real-world evidence of “flattening the curve” in the province of Lodi where harsh movement restrictions were enacted quickly (Feb 23rd) vs later in Bergamo (March 8th). #flatteningthecurve*



They say that the strict lockdown in Lodi appears to show a flattening of the curve of the epidemic.

Flattening the curve is a term that is being employed to show that measures such as confinement and social distancing can delay the peak of an epidemic. This means fewer people are in intensive care units in hospitals, which will help to slow the burden on health care systems.

“While cases in the province of Bergamo began to increase from Feb 24th, in contrast to Lodi no shutdowns or restrictions were imposed,” the Oxford sociologists note in a study on how demographics can affect the epidemic.

The entire province of Lombardy was instead shut down roughly two weeks later on March 8.

Note: For the latest stats on the Coronavirus go here: <https://ncov2019.live/data>

Source:

<https://www.euronews.com/2020/03/17/coronavirus-clinical-trial-for-vaccine-begin-s-as-eu-expected-to-close-external-borders>

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