

WHO Calls to 'Test, Test, Test' amid Growing Restrictive Measures



As of morning 17 March, there are 182,388 confirmed cases of COVID-19, the novel coronavirus, in the world, with 7,152 fatal and 79,432 recovered. After China (over 81,000 confirmed cases and more than 3,200 deaths), Italy has the highest number of confirmed cases, with almost 25,000. Iran and South Korea also have significant outbreaks, with around 14,000 and 8,000 known cases respectively.

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In a televised [press-conference](#) on 16 March, the World Health Organization Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus acknowledged the rapid escalation of COVID-19 cases over the past week, but pointed out that “we have not seen an urgent enough escalation in testing, isolation and contact tracing, which is the backbone of the response.”

“We have a simple message for all countries: test, test, test,” Dr Tedros said. “Test every suspected case, if they test positive, isolate them and find out who they have been in contact with two days before they developed symptoms and test those people, too.”

He underlined that the political commitment at the highest level is necessary for every country. “All countries should be able to test all suspected cases. They cannot fight this pandemic blindfolded; they should know where the cases are,” he added.

Europe Contemplates Massive Travel Restrictions

Since Europe has become the new ‘epicentre’ of the pandemic, on 16 March Ursula von der Leyden, President of the EU Commission, [said](#) the union is preparing guidelines on border measures and proposes temporarily restricting non-essential travel to the EU for the initial period of 30 days while giving priority to essential transport (medication, food, parts for production facilities) “to keep the mobility sector going and ensure economic continuity.”

The measures would not apply to UK nationals, but von der Leyden stressed that the measures must include the four Schengen-associated states too (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland). Permanent EU residents, family members of EU nationals, diplomats, doctors, careworkers and coronavirus researchers as well as people transporting goods would be exempted, she said. “The less travel, the more we can contain the virus,” she said.

The measures may be decided later today, 17 March, during a video-summit with EU leaders hosted by European Council chief Charles Michel.

In the meantime, national EU governments continue to introduce new restrictive measures, including banning public gatherings, closure of educational and recreational facilities and setting curfew hours.

In Spain, which over the weekend climbed to the second most severely affected EU country after Italy, with 9,191 confirmed cases and coronavirus toll climbing to 309 on 16 March, the government [declared](#) a state of emergency. It also announced the requisition of the country’s private healthcare sector as part of the fight against the spread of the coronavirus allowing to take over private healthcare providers and requisition materials such as face masks and tests.

France (over 5,300 confirmed cases) and the UK (over 1,300 cases) are worried that the speed of the outbreak will lead to overcrowding of the healthcare systems.

Other Countries Step Up Protection

The UK Government has also [changed](#) its strategy from an attempt at '[herd immunity](#)' to what is known as 'suppression.' It will effectively confine most of the population to their homes as was the case in China at the onset of the outbreak, and is aimed at avoiding adding pressure on the healthcare system. It is [noted](#), however, that unlike in China, anything that happens in the UK will be voluntary.

To slow the spread of the coronavirus in the U.S., which now has over 4,000 confirmed cases, President Donald Trump announced a strict [set of guidelines](#) for Americans to follow for the next 15 days, which include limiting activities such as eating out, shopping and socialising

African countries are also increasingly [introduce](#) measures to prevent to further spread of the COVID-19, despite the number of confirmed cases still being relatively low. As of 16 March, 27 African countries have recorded only 347 coronavirus cases with 7 deaths, according to WHO. Egypt, Algeria, South Africa and Morocco account for more than half of COVID-19 cases on the continent.

It should be noted that aggressive national-level measures have shown results in [China](#) and [South Korea](#) where the number of new cases has been steadily decreasing recently, and [Taiwan](#), which despite its proximity to China, has managed to contain the outbreak to only 67 cases since having confirmed the first one on 21 January.

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