

As lockdowns mount over COVID-19 worldwide, WHO pleads for more testing

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There are now 183,000 cases of the coronavirus in 162 countries and territories worldwide, meaning that the number of active COVID-19 cases now exceeds the number of recovered patients. This includes more than 600 new deaths, bringing the total toll to over 7,200. The cases outside of China, which is now relatively stable, have now exceeded those within, as Europe has emerged as the new epicenter of the global pandemic with the United States not far behind. Emergency measures across entire nations are now commonplace as the virus shows little signs of being contained.

France, Italy, Spain and Germany are under lockdown, a condition now affecting more than 250 million across Europe. Those four countries alone are collectively dealing with upwards of 52,000 cases, of which 2,663 have resulted in deaths. Fifty-seven countries on every inhabited continent have some form of travel restriction, many of them directed against Europe or the United States, in an attempt to stem the pandemic that is accelerating across the globe.

In the United States, California, Ohio, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Washington, Kentucky, Maryland, Indiana, Rhode Island and Pennsylvania have all issued orders to close schools, restaurants and/or bars. The 6.7 million people living in the six counties including and surrounding San Francisco are now under a “shelter in place” order for the next three weeks, which will be enforced by local police to “ensure compliance.” New Jersey residents are now being “strongly discouraged” from leaving their homes after 8:00 p.m., which will be enforced by the state’s contingent of the National Guard.

These bans are in addition to a nationwide directive from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced Monday recommending against any gathering of more than 10 people.

As the World Health Organization (WHO) noted, however, such actions in and of themselves are insufficient to stop the spread of the disease. WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said yesterday that governments were not doing enough to combat the pandemic and urged them to step up their testing programs.

“[W]e have not seen an urgent enough escalation in testing, isolation and contact tracing—which is the backbone of the response. ... You can’t fight a fire blindfolded and we can’t stop this pandemic if we don’t know who is infected,” he said at a news conference in Geneva. “We have a simple message for all countries: test, test, test.”

The organization has also repeatedly stressed that the magnitude of the pandemic “does not mean countries should give up. The idea that countries should shift from containment to mitigation is wrong and dangerous. ... This is a controllable pandemic. Countries that decide to give up on fundamental public health measures may end up with a larger problem, and a heavier burden on the health system that requires more severe measures to control.”

Nowhere can this breakdown of a public health system be seen more clearly than in the United States, where the Trump administration is only this week beginning to roll out mass, nationwide coronavirus testing. On Monday, during the administration’s now daily coronavirus press briefing, US President Donald Trump tried to excuse the lack of testing in the country by claiming, “We have an invisible enemy. We have a problem where a month ago no one even thought about.”

This is a bald-faced lie. Based on the highly contagious and deadly nature of the virus, the WHO designated the virus a “Public Health Emergency of

International Concern” on January 31, the day that officials confirmed human-to-human transmission in the US. By mid-February, South Korea was able to test 10,000 individuals per day while keeping hospitals and clinics supplied and staffed to receive and isolate any individual who tested positive. Italy, where the health system has become largely overwhelmed by more than 28,000 cases, has still been able to perform at least 60,000 coronavirus tests. The US, by contrast, has so far done less than half of that number.

Instead, the Trump administration has opened the spigot of the Federal Reserve and provided \$2.2 trillion to the financial sector in an attempt to bolster the stock market. This sum, compared to the resources asked for by the World Health Organization, could provide enough masks, gowns, ventilators and other critical medical supplies to contain the pandemic *3,000 times over*.

At the same time, Trump has tweeted, “I ask all Americans to band together and support your neighbors by not hoarding unnecessary amounts of food and essentials.”

In response to these words, a worker from West Virginia, who is pregnant and has to visit a potentially infected hospital twice a week, wrote to the WSWS: “These dipshits caused this panic through their criminal misinformation, response delay, and ransacking of our public health infrastructure. And now they have the gall to point at the scared person who bought extra toilet paper as if they’re the problem.”

Moreover, such resources could have stopped the coronavirus from becoming a pandemic in the first place. Comprehensive testing and isolation could have been done to people infected inside and outside of China, in addition to providing the necessary medical care to allow them to recover. It would have also been more than enough to compensate those people who lost wages while they were out sick. And COVID-19 would have been remembered as a dangerous but ultimately contained disease.

Instead, it has become the policy of governments in North America and Europe that millions will become infected and die. The CDC estimates that up to 216 million people in the United States alone will contract the virus. Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, bluntly stated that “it’s possible” that hundreds of thousands or

millions of people will die as a result.

This has been echoed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who announced last week that she expects 70 percent of the German population to get the virus. The government of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson stated that the best solution to combat the virus is to gain “herd immunity” by potentially getting “up to 80 percent of the population” infected.

These statements are a prescription for mass manslaughter. As the example of Italy makes clear, the health care systems of even the supposedly “first-world” countries essentially disintegrate with only a few tens of thousands of cases, at which the mortality rates for the virus become about 5 percent because of the lack of critical medical supplies. The governments of the United States, Germany and Britain are suggesting that the only way to defeat the pandemic is for 10 million to 15 million people to die.



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