

China, South Korea and Germany report new COVID-19 outbreaks

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China, Germany and South Korea have all reported substantial new outbreaks of COVID-19 after they eased lockdowns, sparking warnings that efforts to lift lockdowns in Europe and the United States risk a major new resurgence of the disease.

There are now nearly 4.2 million reported infections of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus worldwide, and just under 284,000 deaths caused by the resulting disease. The number of daily new cases has risen from a two-week low on April 27 of about 66,000 to more than 80,000 yesterday, as the pandemic continues to spread from its current epicenters in Western Europe and the United States to Africa, South America, South Asia and countries of the former Soviet Union.

Two new clusters of coronavirus cases were reported in China over the weekend, as well as a single larger outbreak in Seoul, South Korea. Concurrently, the German government reported that outbreaks had begun to grow exponentially again.

These clusters of new infections include 14 cases discovered in China on May 4, including one in Hubei province, the original epicenter of the pandemic. This is especially concerning given that the number of new cases in China had been in the single digits during previous weeks, a result of the country's lockdown from January through March and strict policies of testing, quarantining and contact tracing, as well as enforcement of the use of personal protective equipment for civil servants, health care workers and citizens.

South Korea's cluster emerged after a 29-year-old patient from the city of Yongin visited five nightclubs in the Itaewon area on May 1, and then visited the neighboring Gyeonggi and Gangwon provinces before testing positive for COVID-19. He came into contact with more than 1,300 people, of which at least 54 have

now contracted the infection. This number is expected to rise as the South Korean government continues to trace the progress of the outbreak. In response, the country's nightclubs and similar institutions have all been closed indefinitely.

While there have been no new major clusters reported in Germany, the Robert Koch Institute, which tracks the spread of the pandemic, noted that the reproduction rate for the virus in the country rose to 1.1 in the past week, which means that the number of new cases is again increasing.

In all three countries, the new coronavirus cases have come after the partial lifting of lockdown measures. Germany first allowed museums, monuments, botanical gardens, parks and zoos, as well as religious services, to resume on April 30, while Hubei and China as a whole began lifting their most stringent lockdown measures in mid-April. And while the cases in China and Germany have not yet been directly traced to the measures taken to reopen their respective economies, the new cases in South Korea have been.

Iran was also forced to lock down Abadan county, which is in Khuzestan province, after a sharp spike in coronavirus cases. Gholamreza Shariati, the governor of the province, stated, "The number of cases in the provinces has tripled, and the hospitalization of patients has risen by 60 percent." Iran has been desperately attempting to reopen its economy in the face of crippling US-imposed sanctions.

The dangers of reopening too soon have been voiced repeatedly by the World Health Organization (WHO). At Friday's press conference, Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove warned, "What we are learning from those countries who are slowly opening up their economies again—and we've talked about this before—is that once these measures are lifted, they need to be measured in a very

slow and controlled way because it's possible for the virus to take off again."

Dr. Michael Ryan also spoke on this topic, noting that even as countries and regions around the world open up, they are still "avoiding the uncomfortable reality that we need to get back to public health surveillance. We need to go back where we should have been months ago--finding cases, tracking cases, testing cases, isolating people who are tested positive, doing quarantine for contacts."

As more and more countries begin to reopen, the risks of not following through with these procedures spiral higher and higher. Throughout the world, capitalist governments are not focused on the preservation of human life, but on getting workers back to work to generate profits for the capitalist oligarchy.

For example, in Italy, the reopening that began on May 4 is focused primarily on manufacturing and construction. This is being driven largely by the auto giant Fiat Chrysler, which restarted its van plant in Atessa even before the official reopening, and opened its other Italian plants last week. Luxury automaker Ferrari has also resumed production in the country.

Last Monday, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis announced that travel within individual prefectures was no longer restricted, as the precursor to recommencing tourism in his country. Currently, the country has 2,716 coronavirus cases and 151 confirmed deaths, relatively low compared to the rest of Europe, which led Tourism Minister Charis Theocharis to assert, "We expect tourists from Europe, and in this context, our country has an advantage, as out of all Mediterranean regions we are the safest."

Of course, this process finds its sharpest expression in the United States, where President Donald Trump has spearheaded the drive to get workers back into the factories, offices and workplaces as quickly as possible. While the official guidelines state that a county or state can proceed through the phases only after a "downward trajectory of documented cases within a 14-day period," a requirement that itself is open to interpretation, they also note that state and local officials can "tailor" these guidelines as they see fit. This allowed Georgia Governor Brian Kemp to essentially open the entire state while still having 31,763 active cases, more than most entire countries.

The rush to reopen, despite the protestations of world

leaders, is not an approach "based on up-to-date data" that "mitigates [the] risk of resurgence." To again cite Dr. Ryan, "We're at the very, very early stages of our understanding of how this virus affects the body, how disease progresses, what diseases this infection causes."

Every day brings new medical revelations showing that the disease can cause blood clots in young children and strokes in those in their 30s, as well as a host of liver, heart, brain and even toe complications. Every bit of the science screams that, with the progress that has been made in containing the pandemic, even more strict measures should be put into place so that no one else has to suffer or die as therapeutics and vaccines are developed.

Instead, lives and livelihoods are sacrificed at the altar of the market. The chief concern of Trump, Merkel, Mitsotakis and their counterparts is to get workers back to generating profits, not in order to combat the disease and provide for the tens of millions who have been thrown into destitution, but to inflate the portfolios of the superrich.



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