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## Europe stunned by American coronavirus response as US approaches five million infections

The United States' failure to contain the spread of coronavirus has been met with astonishment and alarm in Europe

By Associated Press

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The United States' failure to contain the spread of coronavirus has been met with astonishment and alarm in Europe, as the world's most powerful country edges closer to a global record of five million confirmed infections.

Perhaps nowhere outside the US is America's bungled virus response viewed with more consternation than in [Italy, which was ground zero of Europe's epidemic](#).

Italians were unprepared when the outbreak exploded in February and the country still has one of the [world's highest official death tolls at 35,000](#).

But after a strict nationwide 10-week lockdown, vigilant tracing of new clusters and general acceptance of mask mandates and social distancing, Italy has become a model of virus containment.

"Don't they care about their health?" a mask-clad Patrizia Antonini asked about people in the United States as she walked with friends along the banks of Lake Bracciano, north of Rome.

"They need to take our precautions ... they need a real lockdown."

Much of the incredulity in Europe stems from the fact that America had the benefit of time, European experience and medical know-how to treat the virus that the continent itself didn't have when the first Covid patients started filling intensive care units.

Donald Trump clashes with HBO reporter over Covi...



Yet, more than four months into a sustained outbreak, the US is about to hit an astonishing milestone of five million confirmed infections, easily the highest in the world.

Health officials believe the actual number is closer to 50 million, given testing limitations and the fact that as many as 40 per cent of all cases are asymptomatic.

"We Italians always saw America as a model," said Massimo Franco, columnist with daily *Corriere della Sera*. "But with this virus we've discovered a country that is very fragile, with bad infrastructure and a public health system that is non-existent."

Italian Health Minister Roberto Speranza hasn't shied away from criticising the US, officially condemning as "wrong" [Washington's decision to withhold funding from the World Health Organisation](#) and marvelling personally at President Donald Trump's virus response.

After [Mr Trump finally donned a protective mask last month](#), Mr Speranza told La7 television: "I'm not surprised by Trump's behaviour now; I'm profoundly surprised by his behaviour before."

President Donald Trump wears a mask as he tours the Whirlpool Corporation facility in Clyde, Ohio, on August 6 | CREDIT: AP Photo/Susan Walsh

With America's list-leading 160,000 dead, politicised resistance to masks and rising caseload, European nations have barred American tourists and visitors from other countries with growing cases from freely travelling to the bloc.

France and Germany are now imposing tests on arrival for travellers from "at risk" countries, the US included.

"I am very well aware that this impinges on individual freedoms, but I believe that this is a justifiable intervention," German Health Minister Jens Spahn said in announcing the tests last week.

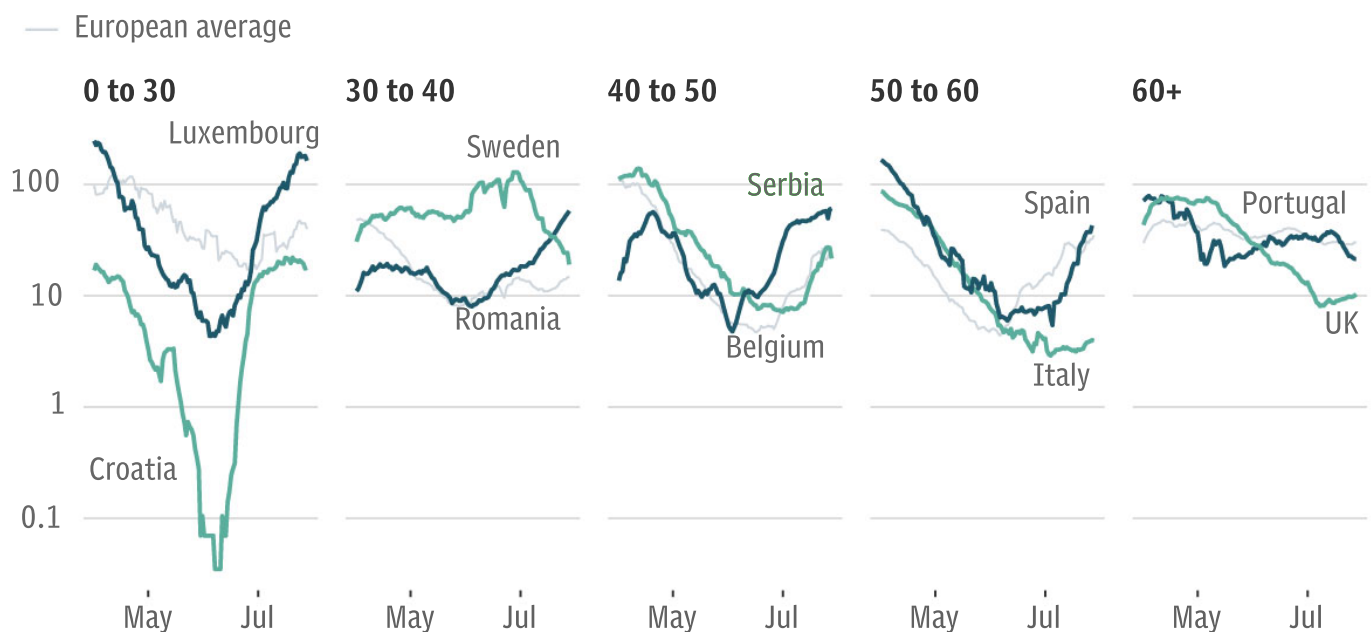
Mistakes were made in Europe, too, from delayed lockdowns to insufficient protections for nursing home elderly and critical shortages of tests and protective equipment for medical personnel.

The virus is still raging in some Balkan countries and thousands of maskless protesters demanded an end to virus restrictions in Berlin earlier this month.

Hard-hit Spain, France and Germany have seen infection rebounds with new cases topping 1,000 a day, and Italy's cases inched up over 500 on Friday.

### Cases are rising across Europe - at a greater rate in countries with less stringent lockdown measures

*Daily new cases per million (seven day rolling average) and average stringency index in last fortnight*



SOURCE: OUR WORLD IN DATA, PHE, BLAVATNIK SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

The UK is still seeing an estimated 3,700 new infections daily, and some scientists say the country's [beloved pubs might have to close again if schools are to reopen](#) in September without causing a new wave.

In the US, new cases run at about 54,000 a day - an immensely higher number even when taking into account its larger population.

And while that's down from a peak of well over 70,000 last month, cases are rising in nearly 20 states, and deaths are climbing in most.

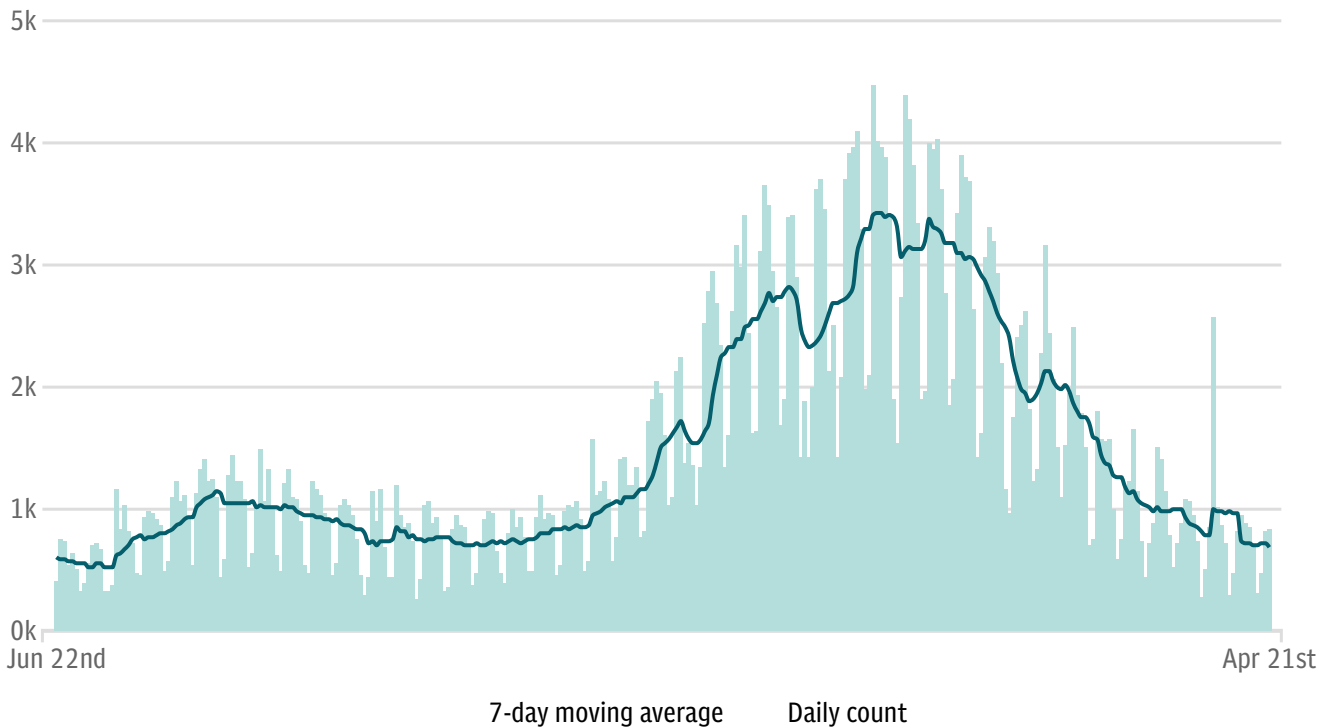
USA | ▼ Down \*

Known cases

Known deaths

Confirmed new deaths

Updated: 21st April, 2021



\* Today's 7-day average compared to yesterday's 7-day average



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In contrast, at least for now Europe appears to have the virus somewhat under control.

"Had the medical professionals been allowed to operate in the States, you would have belatedly gotten to a point of getting to grips with this back in March," said Scott Lucas, professor of international studies at the University of Birmingham, England.

"But of course, the medical and public health professionals were not allowed to proceed unchecked," he said, referring to Mr Trump's frequent undercutting of his own experts.

When the virus first appeared in the United States, [Mr Trump and his supporters quickly dismissed it as either a "hoax" or a virus](#) that would quickly disappear once warmer weather arrived.

At one point, Mr Trump suggested that [ultraviolet light or injecting disinfectants would eradicate the virus](#). (He later said he was being facetious.)

Mr Trump's frequent complaints about Dr Anthony Fauci have regularly made headlines in Europe, where the US infectious diseases expert is a respected eminence grise. Italy's leading Covid hospital offered Dr Fauci a job if Mr Trump fired him.

[Mr Trump has defended the US response, blaming China, where the virus was first detected](#), for America's problems and saying the US numbers are so high because there is so much testing.

Trump supporters and Americans who have refused to wear masks against all medical advice back that line.

Dr David Ho, director of the Aaron Diamond AIDS Research Centre at Columbia University Irving Medical Centre, who is leading a team seeking treatments for Covid-19, decried such behaviour, as well as the country's handling of the virus.

"There's no national strategy, no national leadership and there's no urging for the public to act in unison and carry out the measures together," he said. "That's what it takes and we have completely abandoned that as a nation."

When he gets on Zoom calls with counterparts from around the globe, "everyone cannot believe what they're seeing in the US and they cannot believe the words coming out of the leadership".

Even the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, has taken the unusual step of criticising the US when she urged Washington to reconsider its decision to break ties with WHO.

She also issued veiled criticism of US efforts to buy up stocks of any vaccine that might prove effective, vowing the EU will work to provide access to everyone "irrespective of where they live".

Many Europeans point proudly to their national health care systems that not only test but also treat Covid for free, unlike the American system where the virus crisis has only exacerbated income and racial inequalities in accessing health care.

"The coronavirus has brutally stripped bare the vulnerability of a country that has been sliding for years," wrote Italian author Massimo Gaggi in his new book *Crack America* (Broken America) about US problems that long predated Covid.

Mr Gaggi said he started writing the book last year and thought then that the title would be taken as a provocative wake-up call. Then the virus hit.

"By March the title wasn't a provocation any longer," he said. "It was obvious."

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