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U.S. weekly jobless claims drop, but coronavirus layoffs loom



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Italy and South Korea virus outbreaks reveal disparity in deaths and tactics



FILE PHOTO: Medical workers wearing protective masks check patients at a medical checkpoint at the entrance of the Spedali Civili hospital in Brescia, Italy March 3, 2020. REUTERS/Flavio Lo Scalzo

MILAN/SEOUL (Reuters) - In Italy, millions are locked down and more than 800 people have died from the coronavirus. In South Korea, hit by the disease at about the same time, only a few thousand are quarantined and 67 people have died. As the virus courses through the world, the story of two outbreaks illustrates a coming problem for countries now grappling with an explosion in cases.

It's impractical to test every potential patient, but unless the authorities can find a way to see how widespread infection is, their best answer is lockdown.

Italy started out testing widely, then narrowed the focus so that now, the authorities don't have to process hundreds of thousands of tests. But there's a trade-off: They can't see what's coming and are trying to curb the movements of the country's entire population of 60 million people to contain the disease. Even Pope Francis, who has a cold and delivered his Sunday blessing over the internet from inside the Vatican, said he felt "caged in the library."

Thousands of miles away in South Korea, authorities have a different response to a similar-sized outbreak. They are testing hundreds of thousands of people for infections and tracking potential carriers like detectives, using cell phone and satellite technology.

Both countries saw their first cases of the disease called COVID-19 in late January. South Korea has since reported 67 deaths out of nearly 8,000 confirmed cases, after testing more than 222,000 people. In contrast, Italy has had 827 deaths and identified more than 12,000 cases after carrying out more than 73,000 tests on an unspecified number of people.

Epidemiologists say it is not possible to compare the numbers directly. But some say the dramatically different outcomes point to an important insight: Aggressive and sustained testing is a powerful tool for fighting the virus.

Jeremy Konyndyk, a senior policy fellow at the Center for Global Development in Washington, said extensive testing can give countries a better picture of the extent of an outbreak. When testing in a country is limited, he said, the authorities have to take bolder actions to limit movement of people.

"I'm uncomfortable with enforced lockdown-type movement restrictions," he said. "China did that, but China is able to do that. China has a population that will comply with that."

The democracies of Italy and South Korea are useful case studies for countries such as America, which have had problems setting up testing systems and are weeks behind on the infection curve. So far, in Japan and the United States particularly, the full scale of the problem is not yet visible. Germany has

not experienced significant testing constraints, but Chancellor Angela Merkel warned her people on Wednesday that since 60% to 70% of the populace is likely to be infected, the only option is containment.

South Korea, which has a slightly smaller population than Italy at about 50 million people, has around 29,000 people in self-quarantine. It has imposed lockdowns on some facilities and at least one apartment complex hit hardest by outbreaks. But so far no entire regions have been cut off.

Seoul says it is building on lessons learned from an outbreak of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in 2015 and working to make as much information available as possible to the public. It has embarked on a massive testing program, including people who have very mild illness, or perhaps don't even have symptoms, but who may be able to infect others.

This includes enforcing a law that grants the government wide authority to access data: CCTV footage, GPS tracking data from phones and cars, credit card transactions, immigration entry information, and other personal details of people confirmed to have an infectious disease. The authorities can then make some of this public, so anyone who may have been exposed can get themselves - or their friends and family members - tested.



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Russia's top crude grade for China rebounds as Saudi drives up freight, sources say

SINGAPORE (Reuters) - Asia's spot premiums for Russian ESPO Blend crude have rebounded from near record lows after surging supertanker rates made short-haul shipments more attractive to Chinese buyers, three sources told Reuters on Friday.

FILE PHOTO: An employee holds a sample of crude oil at the Yarakta oilfield, owned by Irkutsk Oil Co, in the Irkutsk region, Russia on March 11, 2019. REUTERS/Vasily Fedosenko//File Photo

Paramount Energy SA has sold at least two May-loading ESPO Blend crude cargoes at premiums of \$2-\$3 a barrel to Dubai quotes on a free-on-board (FOB) basis, compared to premiums as low as 25-cents earlier this week, Reuters sources said.

Paramount Energy declined to comment.

The deals cannot be independently verified as companies do not typically comment on such commercial matters.

The cost of freight has become a critical factor for oil buyers this week after a breakdown in a supply-cut deal between Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies, including Russia, unleashed a wave of aggressive oil sales by oil exporters this week.

ESPO Blend crude oil exports from Kozmino are expected to rise to 3.1 million tonnes in May from 3 million tonnes in April loading plan, two industry sources told Reuters on Friday.

Higher exports are expected to be driven by Russia's plan to hike oil production after the OPEC+ deal fell apart.



FILE PHOTO: An employee holds a sample of crude oil at the Yarakta oilfield, owned by Irkutsk Oil Co, in the Irkutsk region, Russia on March 11, 2019. REUTERS/Vasily Fedosenko//File Photo

Russia's Energy Minister Alexander Novak said on Friday Russia can increase its oil production by 200,000 barrels per day in April.

ESPO Blend loading plan for May to be released only around March 25, traders said. Most of May volumes of ESPO Blend are yet to be sold
Top oil exporter Saudi Arabia said on

Wednesday it would launch a program to boost production capacity for the first time in more than a decade, signaling to Russia and other rivals it was ready for a long battle over production levels and market share.

The ESPO crude cargoes will be shipped out of the Kozmino port in Russia's Far East, which is around 1,000km from

Qingdao port in China's Shandong province, home to many independent refineries, also known as teapots. The resulting surge in cut-priced crude sparked a spike in the cost of space on tankers, which has jumped by over 400% from a week ago on the Middle East to China route.

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Editor's Choice



.S. President Trump declares coronavirus pandemic a national emergency during news conference at the White House in Washington



A traveler walks past empty security lines at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport as airlines are reeling from a plunge in bookings and traffic due to the coronavirus pandemic, in SeaTac, Washington



Jane Trachet poses for a photo with her daughter and dog in Brooklyn



U.S. President Trump speaks about coronavirus pandemic during news conference at the White House in Washington



A traveler wearing a mask is pictured as U.S. President Donald Trump is pictured on a television at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport as he declares a national emergency over the coronavirus, in SeaTac Washington



Mar 13, 2020; Kansas City, Missouri, USA; The interior of Johnny's Tavern across the street from Sprint Center is seen following the cancellation of the Big 12 mens basketball tournament due to concerns over the Covid 19 coronavirus. Mandatory Credit: Jay



U.S. President Trump declares coronavirus pandemic an national emergency during news conference at the White House in Washington
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U.S. President Trump declares coronavirus pandemic an national emergency during news conference at the White House in Washington

INFODEMIC: The Fight Against Coronavirus Misinformation/Rumors



People at a pharmacy in New Delhi wearing protective masks [EPA]
Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

With the growing number of coronavirus cases and information coming at a rapid speed, it's hard to separate fact from fiction. It's only natural to seek out information about a new virus COVID-19 – but it's something scientists are still learning about – so we don't have all the answers. Some people are filling that void with misinformation, others are misunderstanding what the experts are saying.

"We are at a critical point in this outbreak," said Massachusetts Public Health Commissioner Monica Bharel.



If you're struggling with whether to be concerned about coronavirus or not panic about the pandemic – you're not alone. Health officials across the world agree this is uncharted territory – and that's something that makes this novel coronavirus known as COVID-19 so different from the flu. The coronavirus outbreak has impacted many in the Bay State, with dozens of cases being acknowledged by health officials. Many col-

leges are moving to online education to... Read more "Public health authorities are recognizing that not all cases can be linked to international travel or to isolated chains of transmission," Bharel said. Separating fact from fiction can be increasingly difficult when you're being bombarded by speculation on social media and rapidly evolving information.



For example, several people have been asserting online that there is only one case of coronavirus in Massachusetts – when health officials had said there were 95 people as of Wednesday who had tested positive for COVID-19. Health officials clarified a presumptive positive test is a positive test, whether it's confirmed by the Centers for Disease Control or not. "We have complete confidence in our state department of public health in sorting the

determination on the case, it's just that we have to use the technical term, presumptive positive," Massachusetts Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders said.

On the other hand, rumors have gotten out of control – with some spreading false information like impending lockdowns and dozens of deaths in local communities. "In general individuals recover well from this disease and as you may recall from previous discussions, of everybody who gets COVID-19, the vast majority, over 80% have mild symptoms," Bharel said.



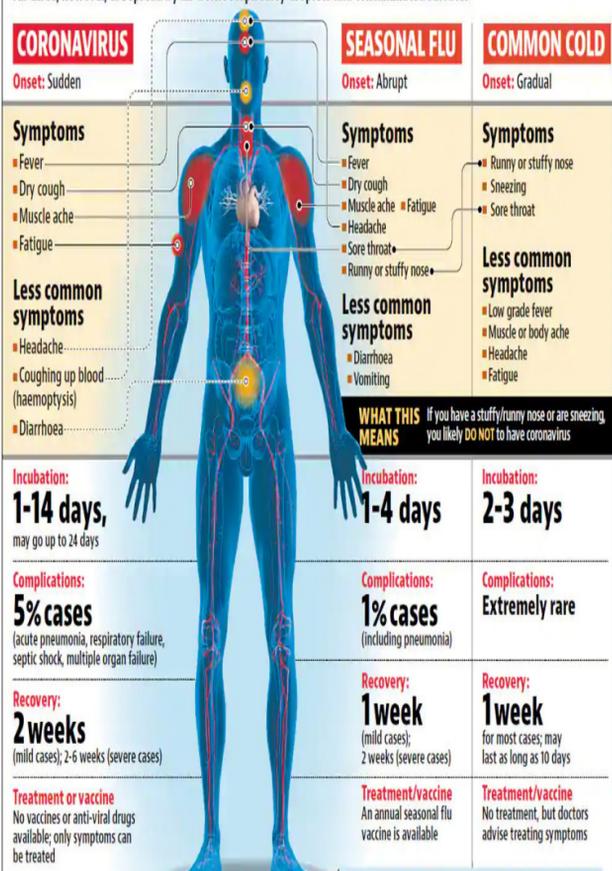
Bottom line – if it sounds far-fetched, it probably is. For direct information, you can visit the CDC or DPH website to answer any questions you may have. (Courtesy <https://www.nbc.com>/)

Related
(From the Editor: We are living in a time where history is made every day - every hour, even - as a result of the novel coronavirus epidemic. This now worldwide epidemic has caught the entire world off guard, while the spread of the illness has been pervasive and deadly. Going forward, we need to follow the directives of government and health officials to ensure the health of ourselves and families, while giving no merit to misinformation and rumors that will surely follow. The chart below is detailed but easy to understand. It addresses the basic problem we all have when we begin to show flu-like symptoms. Please refer to this chart to help yourself and your family understand what your symptoms really are and share the chart with others. While the battle continues against the coronavirus, there is no reason to panic. This is a time to be well-informed

and make the right decisions. - Editor, Southern Daily News)

CORONAVIRUS, FLU, COLD?

As the number of coronavirus cases rise, some key differences set coronavirus apart from the seasonal flu and the common cold – mainly the intensity of the symptoms and the recovery period. A guide at identifying the differences in the three conditions. All three, however, are spread by air-borne respiratory droplets and contaminated surfaces



SEVEN KINDS OF CORONA

Seven strains of coronavirus (CoV) that infect humans have been identified. These cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV)

Harmless

- Serotype 229E
- Serotype OC43
- Serotype NL63
- Serotype HKU1

 These cause symptoms of the common cold, and rarely cause severe pneumonia

Dangerous
 These are known to cause more severe disease. These are:
 1. **Sars-CoV** which causes severe acute respiratory syndrome (Sars)
 2. **Mers-CoV** was that causes Middle East respiratory syndrome (Mers)
 3. **Sars-CoV2** that causes coronavirus disease (Covid-19)

The unknowns of Sars-CoV2

Sars-CoV2 is closely related (with 88% identity) to two bat-derived Sars-like coronaviruses (bat-SL-CoV-ZC45 and bat-SL-CoV-ZC22) collected in 2018 in Zhoushan, eastern China. It has 79% genetic affinity with Sars-CoV, 50% with Mers-CoV. On smooth surfaces such as tables, phones etc, Sars-CoV retains its viability for 5 days at 22-25°C and relative humidity of 40-50%, which is typical for air-conditioned rooms. Though this may vary for Sars-CoV2, experts say this is a good indicator for its behaviour. The Sars-CoV2 receptor-binding domain structure, which allows a virus to latch on to and enter a cell, is similar to Sars-CoV, despite amino acid variation at some key residues. Little is known about Sars-CoV2, studies on Sars-CoV provide clues to its behaviour and ability to infect.

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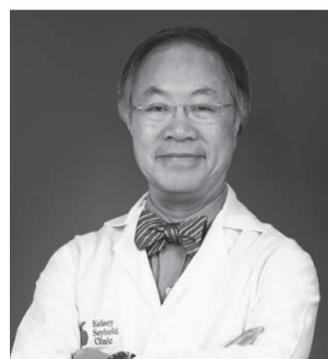
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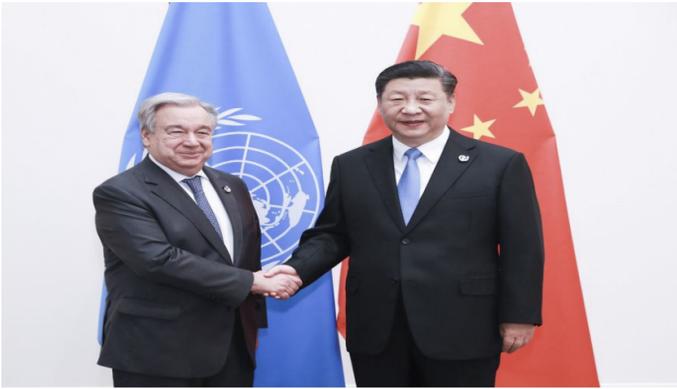
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President Xi Talks With UN Chief – Stresses Need For Urgent Int'l. Action Against COVID-19



Chinese President Xi Jinping (R) meets with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in Osaka, Japan, June 28, 2019. (Xinhua/Pang Xinglei)

OVERVIEW

China stands ready to share its experience with other countries, carry out joint research and development on drugs and vaccines, and offer as much assistance as it can to countries where the disease is spreading, Xi said.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

BEIJING, March 13 (Xinhua) -- Chinese President Xi Jinping on Thursday spoke with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres over phone, urging the international community to take urgent action in the fight against the COVID-19 epidemic. Xi recalled that since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease, Guterres has written to him to extend sympathies and express appreciation of China's prevention and control measures, and has publicly voiced support for China's anti-epidemic efforts on multiple occasions. The Chinese president conveyed his gratitude to the UN chief, pointing out that as Chinese people often say, "a friend in need is a friend indeed." Thanks to arduous endeavors, China has been witnessing a domestic trend in which the situation of epidemic prevention and control is making sustained progress and the order of life and pro-

duction is being restored at an increasing pace, Xi said. For the next step, he added, China will act as prudently at the end as at the beginning, and carry on its prevention and control efforts in an unrelenting, solid and meticulous fashion, and meanwhile earnestly advance all aspects of work in economic and social development.



Technicians work on the manufac-

turing line of China's ARJ21 aircraft at a factory in Shanghai, east China, March 6, 2020. The factory of Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China Ltd. in Shanghai has resumed production amid epidemic prevention and control efforts. (Xinhua/Ding Ting)

The Chinese people will definitely prevail over the COVID-19 epidemic and will also definitely realize its intended targets for economic and social development, Xi said. "I am fully confident in that."

Xi stressed that the Chinese people's hard work has won precious time for and made important contributions to other countries' epidemic prevention and control.

Noting that with COVID-19 having recently occurred and spread in a number of countries, the situation is worrying, he urged the international community to take urgent action and carry out effective international cooperation in joint prevention and control, so as to form a strong concerted force to beat the disease.

China stands ready to share its experience with other countries, carry out joint research and development on drugs and vaccines, and offer as much assistance as it can to countries where the disease is spreading, Xi said.

He added that China supports the United Nations and the World Health Organization (WHO) in mobilizing the international community to enhance policy coordination, expand resources input, and particularly help developing countries with poor public health systems prepare themselves for prevention and response. China, he said, has announced a 20-million-U.S.-dollar donation to the WHO in support of its efforts to organize international actions against the epidemic.

The epidemic has once again demonstrated that mankind is a community with a shared future that shares weal and woe, Xi stressed, adding that in the era of economic globalization, COVID-19 will not be the world's last major emergency, and various traditional and non-traditional security issues will constantly bring about new tests.



Photo taken on March 1, 2020 shows medical supplies, including masks, gloves and protective suits, donated to Italy by Lishui City, east China's Zhejiang Province. (Photo/Xinhua)

The international community has to see humanity as one community with a shared future, look out for one another, and join hands to tackle risks and challenges and build a beautiful planet, said the Chinese president.

Noting that this year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, Xi said China supports the international community in taking that as an opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to multilateralism, and reinforce and improve the global governance system with the United Nations at the core. The Chinese side, he added, will continue supporting the work of the world body.

For his part, Guterres said he is very pleased with and congratulates China on the significant decrease of COVID-19 cases in China.

The UN chief said he believes that with firm determination and strong resilience, China will both overcome the epidemic and restore economic order in a rapid manner, which not only serves the interests of the Chinese people, but also represents an important contribution to the world.



UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations thanks China for helping countries currently in difficul-

ties to fight against COVID-19, said Guterres, adding that the world body appreciates China's sharing of experience in epidemic prevention and control with developing countries and provision of such valuable assistance as medical supplies, vaccines and medicines.

He said that China's support is crucial to multilateralism, and that the United Nations hopes to further deepen its cooperation with China in climate change, sustainable development and various other fields, and looks forward to China playing an important leading role in international affairs. (Courtesy <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english>)



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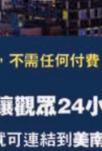


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