Coronavirus Outbreak: Should You Cancel a Trip to Europe?
From Iceland to Bulgaria, here's how COVID-19 is impacting European countries.

[Editor's note: This is an updated version of an earlier article that originally ran on March 4.]

The new coronavirus disease, COVID-19, is spreading rapidly around the world. Italy is currently Europe's hotspot with Spain's cases falling not far behind. Read up on the coronavirus situation generally, including how to prevent the further spread of COVID-19 at The Latest: Should You Change Your Travel Plans Due to the Coronavirus? (https://www.fodors.com/news/news/should-you-change-your-travel-plans-because-of-the-coronavirus) (Short answer: yes, we should all be avoiding travel right now). Here's what you need to know specifically about Europe.

The Latest

The number of new cases in Italy continues to climb rapidly, and it's the same situation for Spain. In response, Spain has echoed the emergency measures put in place by Italy. Everything but essential services (such as food stores and pharmacies) is closed in both countries. Residents are told to stay in their homes except to get medical care, buy food and, in some cases only, go to work. France is closing down as well with increased measures expected to be announced March 16. Tourist sites in all countries are closed. G7 leaders are speaking on March 16 to discuss a joint COVID-19 response.
Airlines are curtailing flights in response to border closures and reduced demand. Travelers in Europe, as well as the rest of the world, report showing up at the airport to have their flight canceled and needing to try to reschedule.

Last Week

Many countries, including the U.S. and Canada, are advising their citizens not to travel abroad. As of March 13, the Canadian government is recommending Canadians who are traveling make arrangements to return home as soon as possible.

On March 11, Donald Trump announced a new travel ban against Europe's 26 Schengen countries (https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-policy/schengen_visa_en) and on March 14, the U.K. and Ireland were added. The ban means that, as of March 14, foreign nationals who have been in any of those countries within the last 14 days are barred from entering the U.S. for the next 30 days. It does not apply to U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and their immediate families. They are able to return home but may be required to self-isolate or be quarantined for 14 days.

On March 12, the CDC issued a level-3 warning to avoid non-essential travel in Europe (https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/warning/coronavirus-europe) and listed the countries this applies to. As of March 16, it is still excluding the U.K. and Ireland. At the same time, the CDC (https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/alert/coronavirus-global) announced a global outbreak with a level 2 alert recommending Americans “practice enhanced precautions.” The U.S. State Department (https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/ea/covid-19-information.html) raised their travel advisory to level three, recommending “reconsider all travel”.

Europe Overall

COVID-19 was reported in Europe almost a month after the first cases were confirmed in China. Europe is currently the most affected continent after Asia and called the COVID-19 epicenter. The end of February 2020 brought a rapid spread of the disease across the continent. Italy remains the most affected country but Spain is not far behind.

Within Europe, actions to combat COVID-19 continue to increase. On March 2, 2020, the President of the EU raised the risk level for coronavirus from moderate to high. As of March 16, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) says that 51,771 cases and 2,316 deaths have been reported (https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/cases-2019-ncov-eueea) in the EU/EEA, the U.K., Monaco, San Marino, and Switzerland. All EU/EEA countries and the U.K. are affected.

The ECDC posts regular COVID-19 updates (https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/novel-coronavirus-china) on the situation in the European Union, the European Economic Area (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:European_Economic_Area_(EEA)) (EEA) and the United Kingdom. They cover the countries commonly considered as “Europe,” between Iceland and the U.K. in the west and Estonia, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria in the east. Technically, this means the ECDC does include Andorra, Cyprus, Malta, Monaco,
San Marino, and Switzerland, but does not include countries like Albania, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia, and Russia. Some, but not all, of the ECDC’s reporting does include these latter countries. A listing of COVID-19 cases by country is on the ECDC’s Situation Update (https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/cases-2019-ncov-eueea) page.

More and more countries are advising their citizens to reconsider or avoid nonessential travel. If you cannot avoid traveling, check the latest with the World Health Organization (WHO) (https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019), with the ECDC (https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/novel-coronavirus-china), and with the public health agency of the destination you plan to visit. There you’ll find the latest case numbers, the restrictions and quarantine requirements in place, and how overwhelmed the country’s health care system is.

Getting to and from Europe is getting increasingly difficult as several airlines have canceled or curtailed flights to many European locations. More are expected. For arrival into Europe, know that several countries are instituting mandatory 14-day self-isolation or quarantine for all arrivals or for some destinations The United States is often included as a mandatory isolation country. When leaving Europe, know that many countries are requiring anyone who has traveled in some parts of Europe to undergo a mandatory 14-day self-isolation or quarantine period upon returning home.

Here’s the latest in some of Europe’s most popular tourist countries.

**Italy**

Italy is the European country currently most affected by COVID-19, with 23,980 cases (https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/cases-2019-ncov-eueea) and 1,811 deaths as of March 16, 2020. Over 2,335 people have recovered. Italy’s first two cases were reported on January 30 and the first death was February 22.

Many in Italy are sick and many more have tested positive. Italy’s hospitals are overwhelmed. March 15 was the deadliest COVID-19 day for the country with 368 deaths, and far surpassed the worst day in China.

There are many factors that are likely contributing to Italy’s high numbers and why the significant outbreak began there. Italy has been testing a large proportion of citizens. As Pharmaceutical Technology (https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/features/covid-19-italy-coronavirus-deaths-measures-airports-tourism/) reports, of all countries in Europe, Italy has the highest number of flights to China (where the first cases of COVID-19 were seen), with the number recently tripling. Italy also has the oldest population in Europe, which means more people susceptible to getting sick and at greater risk of complications and death.

As of March 9, the entire country and its 60 million residents is in lockdown. Everyone in Italy is encouraged to stay home as much as possible and permission is needed to travel not only outside the country but often outside the municipality or region. During the most recent four days, police issued fines to 20,000 people for not complying with the lockdown.

All bars and restaurants are closed. Stores that do not sell essential goods are closed. There’s a 6 p.m. curfew. People are encouraged to keep a distance of three feet from each other and requested to stop greetings involving handshakes, kisses and hugs. Almost all events, whether they be funerals, weddings or sporting events, are canceled and most sites, including schools, museums, and theaters, are closed. Restrictions are now expected to be extended past April 3.

France

As of March 15, much of France is closed, initially announced by France's president (https://www.ft.com/content/00d2866c-6471-11ea-b3f3-fe4680ea68b5) on March 12 (https://www.ft.com/content/00d2866c-6471-11ea-b3f3-fe4680ea68b5) and expanded by the prime minister (https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/14/world/france-coronavirus-measures/index.html) on March 14. The prime minister said “Markets and food shops, pharmacies, gas stations, banks, newspaper, and tobacco stores will remain open. Places of worship will remain open, but religious ceremonies and gatherings will be postponed.” The health minister has advised that social distancing be increased and that handshakes and la bise, the traditional French greeting of a kiss on both cheeks, be curtailed. Public transportation remains open, but people are encouraged to use it as little as possible. France's president will address the nation on March 16 and more severe measures to stop the virus are expected.

Germany

Germany's coronavirus cases are at 4,838 as of March 16, 2020. Germany has had 12 deaths attributed to COVID-19. Germany's first case was reported on January 28. The German chancellor said March 11 that, as epidemiologists have been predicting, roughly a third of Germany's population is expected to contract the virus. She stressed the importance of slowing down the spread to allow the health care system to care for seriously ill patients.

Coronavirus information in English is available on the German government's website (https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/issues/ausbreitung-coronavirus-1726158). Everyone in the country is encouraged to limit contact with others to help slow the spread of the virus. Many events are canceled and sites closed. Businesses are encouraging staff to work from home. The German government is discussing aid measures to protect German workers and businesses.

There is intensive screening at land borders with France, Austria, Luxembourg, Denmark, and Switzerland; borders with the Netherlands and Belgium are not yet affected. Only those deemed on essential business are allowed into Germany.

News outlets like The Guardian (https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/15/trump-offers-large-sums-for-exclusive-access-to-coronavirus-vaccine) are reporting that Donald Trump has offered the German pharmaceutical company, CureVac, “large sums of money” to provide a vaccine “for the U.S. only.” Germany's health minister has said that if CureVac is able to develop a vaccine, it would be available “for the whole world” and “not for individual countries.”
**United Kingdom**

The U.K.’s latest coronavirus information and advice ([https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public#risk-level](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public#risk-level)) is updated daily at 2 p.m. London time. As of March 16, the U.K. has 1,391 cases and 35 COVID-19 deaths. The U.K.’s first cases were in England and reported on January 31. February 28 saw the first cases in Northern Ireland and Wales. Scotland’s first case was on March 2.

The U.K.’s risk level ([https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public)) was raised from low to moderate on January 30, 2020, and is now at high. Though initially excluded from the U.S.-Europe travel ban, the U.K. as well as Ireland are included as of March 14.


Social distancing is being encouraged, as is self-isolation for anyone traveling from an affected area or exhibiting respiratory disease symptoms. Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 are in place to reduce transmission risk and, if advised by public health professionals, keep individuals in isolation. People over 70 are being encouraged to self-isolate. Reducing or canceling large-scale gatherings started on March 4 with the announcement that the March 10-12 London Book Fair is canceled. On March 13, the English Premier League suspended games until April 3. The London Marathon ([https://www.virginmoneylondonmarathon.com/en-gb/](https://www.virginmoneylondonmarathon.com/en-gb/)), planned for April 26, is now canceled.

**Spain**

Spain has 7,753 cases and 288 deaths as of March 16, 2020. The number of new cases is rising rapidly, essentially doubling every three days. The country’s first COVID-19 case was on February 1 and the first death was reported on March 3.

A state of emergency was declared March 14 and the country is in lockdown. The prime minister announced March 14 that, similar to measures in Italy, all non-essential businesses be closed. All bars, restaurants, cafes, hotels, and most stores will be shut for at least 15 days. Residents are being asked to stay home. This follows the closure of schools in Madrid and Vitoria on March 11 and a lockdown of Barcelona on March 13. Spain has requisitioned private health care facilities to be used for fighting COVID-19 and has done the same for supplies like face masks.
So, Should You Change Your Travel Plans?

Yes. Many governments are advising their citizens to reconsider and cancel nonessential travel to Europe (and the rest of the world) in an effort to slow the spread of disease and cushion health care systems. Many governments are strongly encouraging their citizens to return home if they are abroad. Given the new CDC warning and the U.S.-Europe travel ban announced March 11, travel between the two regions is significantly affected. Further reductions in flights is expected.


Be prepared for self-isolation or quarantine when you return home. Seniors and those with underlying health conditions will want to take extra precautions, as will anyone who has close contacts in those categories. We all need to do whatever we can to prevent vulnerable populations from becoming ill and to slow the spread of COVID-19 so our health care systems are able to respond, as outlined in our general coronavirus advice (https://www.fodors.com/news/news/should-you-change-your-travel-plans-because-of-the-coronavirus).