

World Health Organization says lockdowns not enough to defeat virus



Geneva, March 22 (RHC)-- The World Health Organization (WHO) says lockdowns are not enough to defeat the coronavirus pandemic, noting that public health measures are still needed to avoid a resurgence of the virus once the restrictions are lifted.

"What we really need to focus on is finding those who are sick, those who have the virus, and isolate them, find their contacts and isolate them," Mike Ryan, executive director of the WHO's emergencies program said on Sunday.

"The danger right now with the lockdowns ... if we don't put in place the strong public health measures now, when those movement restrictions and lockdowns are lifted, the danger is the disease will jump back up."

The new coronavirus, a respiratory disease known as COVID-19, is believed to have first emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in Hubei Province late last year. It has been reportedly contained in China, but is spreading rapidly around the globe. As many as 300,000 infections have been confirmed worldwide with more than 13,000 fatalities.

As cases of infection with the new coronavirus continue to surge throughout the world, governments are scrambling to put restrictions in place to contain the deadly pandemic. The restrictions have confined one billion people to their homes in different countries.

Ryan also said the examples of China, Singapore and South Korea, which coupled restrictions with rigorous measures to test every possible suspect, provided a model for Europe which has now become the epicenter of the pandemic.

The death toll from the new coronavirus has surpassed 5,000 in Europe, as the number of confirmed cases continues to rise across the continent. "Once we've suppressed the transmission, we have to go after the virus. We have to take the fight to the virus," Ryan said.

Asked about development of a possible vaccine for the virus, the WHO official said several vaccines are in development, but only one has begun trials in the United States. Asked how long it would take before there was a vaccine available in Britain, he said that people needed to be realistic, adding, "We have to make sure that it's absolutely safe... we are talking at least a year." "The vaccines will come, but we need to get out and do what we need to do now."

The European Union has been ramping up its efforts to coordinate the fight against the virus across all its 27 member states as WHO warned on Friday that Europe was now the "epicenter" of the global coronavirus pandemic and was reporting more daily cases than China did at the height of its outbreak.

Italy, the world's hardest hit country, recorded a jump in its death tally from the viral infection on Saturday. Fatalities jumped by 793 to 4,825 in the largest one-day rise since the contagion emerged in Italy a month ago.

Confirmed cases of infection also rose to 53,578 from 47,021, the Civil Protection Agency said Sunday. This is while China where the pathogen has recorded 3,245 deaths from the virus.

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