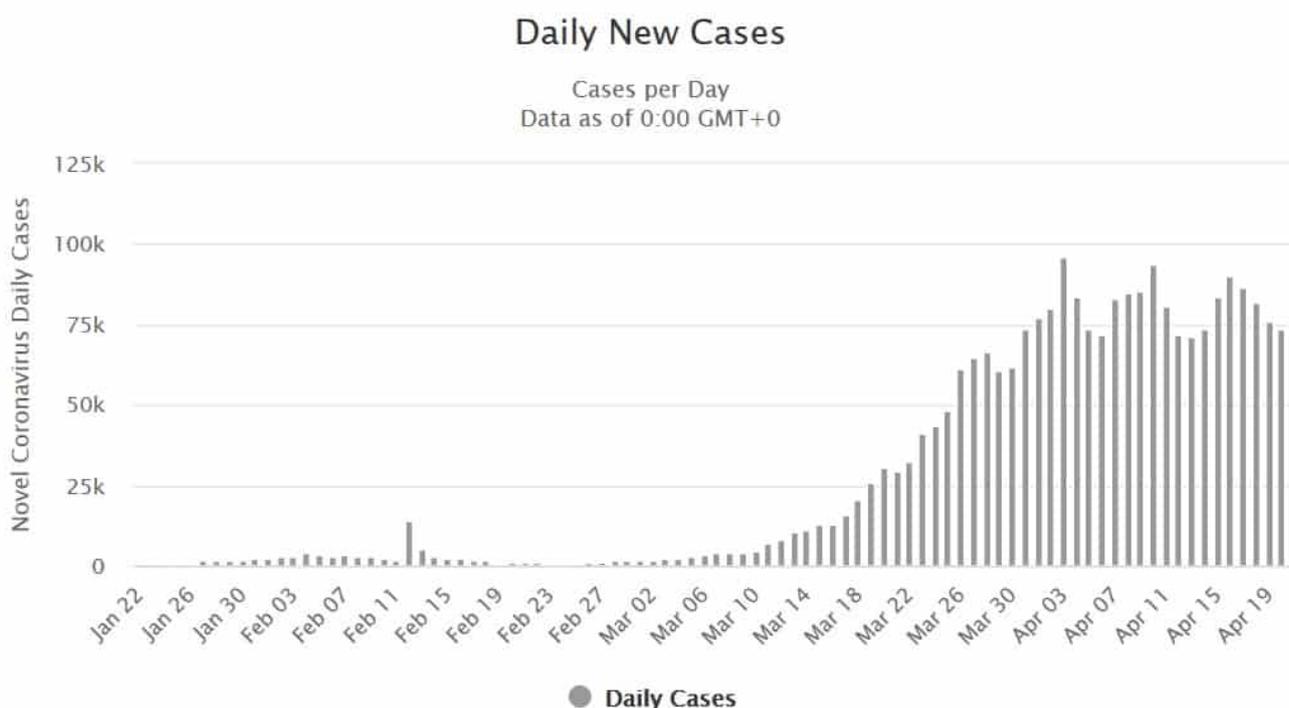


COVID-19 Update: Global coronavirus cases hit 2.5 million as some countries in Europe start to reopen

As of April 22, 2020, global coronavirus cases are **2,557,917 confirmed cases** with **177,688 deaths**. That puts the current death rate from 'known' cases at a staggering 6.9%. Globally the number of new cases appears to be stabilizing, with hopes a decline will soon follow.

Despite the meteoric rise in the number of global cases some countries appear to have contained the virus and are even reopening their businesses. Today we look at those countries as well as the latest developments in coronavirus treatments and vaccines.

The global number of new coronavirus cases has stabilized at ~75,000 per day



Source

A look at countries that have reopened their economies

China

China was the first country to suffer from COVID-19 during January-February 2020, and they were also the first to reopen their economy in March and April, 2020. The Chinese number of new coronavirus cases per day is now usually below 50. This is despite the fact that China has now reopened a large percentage of their economy. This is the good news for China. The bad news is that consumers have been slow to start spending again. Retail spending in March was still 18% lower than a year ago, and new car sales continue to struggle.

Given the scare to the economy and the weak global economy it would seem logical that Chinese spending will take some time to recover, and the March 18% fall is really not bad at all given the circumstances.

South Korea

South Korea was the second country to suffer from COVID-19 during February-March 2020. South Korea has also contained the virus now with new cases usually below 20 per day. South Korea has adopted a cautious reopening with a focus on social distancing, testing and contact tracing. So far it is working, but again consumers are slow to resume normal spending.

Iran

Iran was another of the early hit countries. Iran's new daily cases are down to ~1,300 per day. As of Monday April 20, Iran allowed local market places and shopping malls to reopen.

Germany

Germany's coronavirus daily new cases have significantly decreased and are now running at a bit over 1,000 per day. The

German government announced that the lockdown will be extended until May 3, 2020; although restrictions have been loosened to allow smaller businesses and public places to re-open. Businesses with a sales floor area of up to 800 square meters were reopened on Monday, April 20, 2020. This included car dealerships, cycle shops, bookshops, and final year school students to sit their exams.

Others opening up

Other countries beginning to reopen their economies include: Austria, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, Poland, Albania, and the Czech Republic.

Lockdown exit plans – Some restriction are being eased

Lockdown exit plans

Lifting some restrictions this week

Czech Republic

Five-stage plan starts 20 April with open-air markets and workshops and ends on 8 June. Czechs may now also travel abroad providing they undergo two-week quarantine on return

Germany

Commercial spaces under 800 sq metres can reopen on 20 April as well as car dealerships, bike shops and book stores. Gyms, restaurants, bars and large stores remain closed. Masks are 'urgently' recommended

Norway

Kindergartens and some health specialists to reopen from 20 April. Partial reopening of high schools and universities, hair, massage and beauty salons from 27 April

Poland

Opening parks and forests. Easing limits on number of people in shops

Albania

Mining and oil industries reopen on 20 April plus some other businesses

Source

USA

President Trump has released guidelines for US states to reopen, however the decisions will be taken by each state Governors on a local basis. California Governor Newsom plans today to give an update on when California can reopen. Sixteen U.S. states have formed three coalitions to examine a staged re-opening of their economies. It is looking like reopenings may possibly begin sometime in May; however daily new

coronavirus cases across the whole of the US are still high at about 26,000 per day.

Italy, UK, and Australia (and Canada)

All of these three G20 countries have not yet reopened but are seeing declining new daily case numbers, suggesting we may see some opening up in May. Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte aims to roll out a detailed restart program beginning on May 4. Western and Atlantic Canada is another region that may reopen soon, although new cases in Canada as a whole are still on the rise at this time.

Recent COVID-19 treatment and vaccine news

Gilead Sciences Inc. (NASDAQ: GILD) – Remdesivir

The biggest recent news story was the successful Chicago Hospital study on Gilead Science's antiviral drug remdesivir. What was exciting was that out of the 125 people in the study (113 had severe disease) most have recovered and only 2 have died. Gilead Sciences have said it is still too early to draw conclusions; however the full trial results for the first 400 patients should be out soon (in April). This will be part of a larger global study including 2,400 participants from 152 different clinical trial sites all over the world.

Hydroxychloroquine

A recently announced study of hydroxychloroquine, with or without azithromycin, "found no evidence" that the drug reduced the risk of mechanical ventilation in veterans hospitalized with COVID-19. The FDA has already granted emergency use for hydroxychloroquine, noting it is already an established anti-malaria drug. I expect we will see more studies.

Regeneron Pharmaceuticals Inc. (NASDAQ: REGN)

Regeneron is working on an antibody treatment and vaccine.

Regeneron uses genetic material identical to that of the virus in several dozen mice, provoking an immune response, and then harvesting the antibodies, selected the most effective, and then making a antibody based treatment and/or vaccine. Human trials could begin in June. There is also potential for wider scale use under human trials or under FDA emergency use rules, should they be used.

Regeneron is also testing their anti-inflammatory drug Kevzara, after hearing of good results from Roche Holding Ltd.'s (SW: ROG | OTCQX: RHHBY) anti-inflammatory drug Actemra. In both cases the drugs are not to kill the virus, but rather to reduce the inflammatory response that affects the lungs ability to get oxygen.

Closing remarks

China, South Korea, Iran and a handful of European countries have contained the coronavirus and are reopening their economies. The new normal is quieter businesses, social distancing, wearing face masks and using hand sanitizers.

Rapid progress is being made towards COVID-19 drug development and trials, with some significant success last week in the Remdesivir Chicago hospital study. Official results for the larger study from Gilead on Remdesivir is expected this month. The Chicago hospital report helped stock markets to surge higher on hope of a cure, so any further good news this month should help.

For investors the message is mixed. The good news is some countries are showing the world that reopening the economy is possible whilst still containing the virus. The bad news is that the recovery period for the real economy will likely take some time, perhaps a 'tick' shaped recovery, unlike the stockmarket's current 'V' or perhaps 'W' shaped recovery.