

Italy 'second wave' fears grow as virus cases top 5,000

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Italy was grappling Friday with fears of a second coronavirus wave similar to the ones seen in Britain, France and Spain, as it registered over 5,000 new infections in 24 hours.

"We're under [extreme pressure](#)," the World Health Organization's Italian government adviser Walter Ricciardi said, warning that spaces in COVID-19 hospitals were running out in the worst-hit regions.

Italy registered 5,372 new cases Friday, the health ministry said, nearly 1,000 more than on Thursday. The country has not seen such high numbers of recorded new infections since mid-April.

New infections are still well behind Britain, France and Spain, which are registering between 12,000 and 19,000 cases in 24 hours.

But Ricciardi said the rise in cases could reach those levels in Italy just as winter begins and common influenza strikes.

"When the flu comes, we risk having 16 thousand cases in a day," he said in an interview with

broadcaster Sky TG24.

"I am very worried... (about) sub-intensive units because there are infectious patients who need to be treated in a certain way and beds are already running out. And that's before the flu hits," he said.

The government moved to tackle the sharp rise in case numbers earlier this week, making wearing face masks compulsory in outdoor spaces across the country, on top of all indoor spaces apart from homes.

'Dramatic decisions'

Lazio, the [region](#) which houses capital Rome, has been performing particularly badly, along with Campania in the south and Lombardy in the north, where the pandemic broke out in Italy back in February.

According to official figures, more than 36,000 people have died of the virus in Italy, where a nationwide lockdown—the first in any European country—lasted over two months.

Drained by years of budget cuts, southern Italy's overstretched health care system escaped the brunt of the virus after movement between regions was banned, preventing cases from travelling down the country.

But there are fears it would not escape a second wave.

The Italian Association of Hospital Anaesthesiologists said Friday that hospitals in the south, where infrastructure is weaker, were not ready for an escalating crisis, despite efforts made to boost beds and staff numbers.

Campania's regional president Vincenzo De Luca said on Facebook he thought "we've reached the point where dramatic decisions need to be taken".

He said he could not rule out a new lockdown of the region.

Regional Affairs Minister Francesco Boccia said Friday that if the upward trend continued, movement of people between regions may be temporarily banned.

"A rise in the number of contagions was predictable. Intensive care units have been reinforced," he said.

"However, I cannot rule out limits on movements. Nothing can be ruled out at the moment," he told Radio Capitale.

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