

In its most far-reaching measures to stop the spread of coronavirus, Italy is slowing industrial production nationwide, while the hardest-hit region of Lombardy banned any outdoor exercise not on personal property and set distance limits on dog-walking.

Franco Locatelli, president of Italy's Higher Health Council, said Sunday that with the new stringent measures announced this weekend, Italy had exhausted all the possible ways it could to limit personal and professional contact. That came as Italy announced that the increase in both infections and deaths had showed the first sign of narrowing in the previous 24 hours. "Let's continue to keep social distance," Locatelli said. "Let's adopt these measures, let's manage our behavior and ... certainly we will get the results we are hoping for."

For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever or coughing. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. More than 95,000 people have recovered, mostly in China.

After a week of complaining that too many people were still out and about in Lombardy, authorities in the hardest-hit region with nearly half of Italy's cases and two-thirds of deaths issued the clearest measures yet to close loopholes being leveraged circumvent bans on movement.

As of Sunday, the maximum radius for dog walking was set at 200 meters, and all outdoor sport that cannot be practiced at home was banned — not because sports posed a threat, but because people were abusing the freedom of movement.

Authorities in Lombardy also raised fines for violators to 5,000 euros (\$5,345).

The Lombardy moves came just ahead of new measures announced by Premier Giuseppe Conte to slow industrial production in eurozone's third-largest economy and a major exporter to only sectors deemed crucial. The government on Sunday was still drawing up a list for the slowdown, set to take effect early in the week.

Locatelli urged anyone whose job would be idled by the new measures to not travel to their hometowns, or risk spreading contagion. He also called on the more than 23,700 Italians with the virus and who were isolated at home to steer clear of family members as outlined by the health ministry, to keep the virus in check.

Italy first moved to prevent the virus from arriving in the country by signing an order Jan. 31 shutting down flights to and from China. A day earlier, authorities confirmed that a pair of tourists from Wuhan had tested positive in Rome. Both have since recovered.

But it wasn't until Feb. 21 that the first case of locally transmitted COVID-19 was confirmed, in the town of Codogno, southeast of Milan. The town and 10 others, with a total population of 50,000, were immediately isolated. The government on Feb. 22 created the first red zones in the 11 Lombardy towns and the town of Vo' Eugenio near Padova, with soldiers setting up cordons around the area and residents permitted to leave their homes only for essential activities like shopping. Industrial production was stopped, with rare exception.

The next day, Feb. 23, the governors of Lombardy and neighboring Veneto, where Padua is located, shut down museums, cinemas and theaters. But stores remained open as did restaurants and, until 6 p.m. bars. The closures emptied city centers but appeared to have less impact inhibiting activity in neighborhoods, suburbs or small towns. Fitness routines moved from closed gyms to outdoor parks. The last two days of Carnival in Venice were canceled, emptying the city of tourists. Schools and universities were closed in much of the north.

By the end of that week, the one-meter distance rule was set for shops and restaurants -- but that was not universally observed. Early the next week, people over 75 years of age were advised to stay at home. Schools were closed until March 15 in all of Italy -- later extended until April 3. Non-urgent court trials were suspended.

With cases still multiplying exponentially, the government on March 8 signed measures extending containment zones to all of Lombardy and 14 provinces in the other northern regions affecting a quarter of the population. Under the measures, people could leave their immediate areas only for work, health care or activities of strict necessity, like shopping

When Italian media reported that the closures were imminent, thousands of people jammed trains to get back to homes outside of the new red-zones — a mass movement that virologists have said helped further spread the contagion.

Just a day later, on March 9, the government extended the lockdown to the entire country. But enforcement was still a matter of interpretation. The mayor of Verona closed parks, seeing too much movement, while Florence's mayor seemed to condone an outside jog. Dog walking remained a valid motivation, but videos popped up on social media of Italians with fake dogs, shaggy stuffed animals on the end of stiff leashes.

Two days later, on March 11, all commercial activities except for those providing necessities were closed.

From March 11-15, the Interior Ministry reported 665,480 people had been controlled, with 27,616 people cited.

On Sunday, Rome Police Chief Franco Gabrielli said 80 people had been cited a day earlier -- including for shopping 10 kilometers (six miles) from home, traveling 15 kilometers (about nine miles) to a doctor's appointment and claiming medical reasons for being out for a walk but lacking a doctor's certification.--Net