

The virus and the third wave

The European continent remains the centre of the pandemic storm. As Italy, Germany and France extend their lockdowns and discourage movement outside the home at Easter it is time to set out some of the facts and figures on what has happened so far.

Official figures are produced and updated daily for the worldometer site. They are the best we have, though they are of course influenced by how much testing is carried out in each country to identify the disease, and how doctors fill in death certificates for people suffering from a variety of conditions as well as CV 19. These figures show that the five worst countries for numbers of cases and the five worst countries for acknowledged CV 19 deaths are all continental European. The best countries with fewest deaths and case numbers are likely to be in Asia.

Deaths per million

Gibraltar 2791
Czechia (EU) 2336
San Marino 2325
Belgium (EU) 1955
Hungary (EU) 1940

Cases per million

Andorra 149249
Montenegro 139523
Czechia (EU) 137600
San Marino 129123
Gibraltar 126766

The figures reveal a number of divergencies. Amongst these countries with the worst case and death numbers the death rate measured as deaths in proportion to reported cases varies from as high as nearly 3.2% in Hungary to a little under 1% in Andorra. Does this tell us anything about different treatments, or about death certificate definitions or about the ages of the people catching the virus? Most of these badly affected countries did introduce lockdowns and test and trace systems but still suffered greatly.

The Panorama programme on Monday sought to show that Korea got it right with a strong test and trace system, whilst arguing the Sweden got it wrong by being too relaxed in the first wave of the disease. The Swedish numbers are not out of line with other large EU countries that did go in for longer and earlier lockdowns. Korea's performance is good but so is the performance of many other Asian countries. We need to study a range of possibilities before leaping to policy conclusions. Could it be that past Asian flu varieties gave Asians more natural immunity or ability to fight the virus? Is it that those Asian countries which did go for test, trace and isolate got more compliance from their populations than Europe did? Do diet and vitamins C and D play any

part?

There are lots of facts and figures in circulation, but they need careful study to understand them and their defects before rushing to conclusions about what worked. High urban concentrations of people makes virus passage more likely, and elderly populations suffered the more serious versions of the disease in much larger numbers than younger populations. The latest news from the USA showing in their tests that the Astra Zeneca vaccine is highly effective at stopping serious case and deaths means the Uk hospital admission and death rates should continue to fall as they have been doing as most of the at risk people have now been vaccinated.