

Coronavirus

Make masks compulsory for all Americans, Biden urges

By Rozina Sabur in Washington

JOE BIDEN has called for a nationwide "mask mandate" for the next three months as he seeks to draw a contrast with Donald Trump's handling of the pandemic.

The presumptive Democratic presidential nominee said experts estimate that if every American wore a mask while outside, more than 40,000 lives could be saved in the next three months.

"It's not about your rights. It's about your responsibilities as an American," he said, as he called on every state governor to impose orders requiring people to wear masks.

The 77-year-old had previously loosely suggested that there should be better guidance from the government around mask coverings but has become more aggressive in calling for action.

The president was quick to push back on Mr Biden's comments, made on Thursday, suggesting he wanted to abuse executive powers. He also questioned the legality of such an order.

"If the president has the unilateral power to order every single citizen to cover their face in nearly all instances, what other powers does he have?" Mr Trump asked during a White House briefing.

He went on to claim that Mr Biden was in favour of "locking all Americans in their basements for months on end", while "we want to have a certain freedom - that's what we're about".

More than two dozen governors from both sides of the political aisle have already imposed statewide orders requiring people to wear masks outside.

Those opposed to the measure, such

as Henry McMaster, South Carolina's Republican governor, have argued they represent an unconstitutional barrier to American's civil liberties.

Responding to the criticism, Mr Biden called on the public to "step up, do the right thing".

"This is America. Be a patriot. Protect your fellow citizens," he said during an event in Wilmington, Delaware.

Mr Trump's own position on face coverings has wavered, with the president spending the early months of the pandemic resolutely refusing to wear a mask in public and sharing tweets poking fun at Mr Biden for wearing one.

But with public anger growing over the surging US coronavirus death toll, Mr Trump shifted course, wearing a mask in public for the first time in July.

He went on to suggest that wearing a mask was "patriotic" but stopped short of supporting mask mandates.

The president appeared to waver on the issue again on Thursday when he questioned their effectiveness, saying "maybe they're great, and maybe they're just good. Maybe they're not so good". But he added: "Frankly, what do you have to lose?"

"To Joe, I would say stop playing politics with the virus," he added.

Mr Trump, who is trailing Mr Biden significantly in most nationwide polls has largely avoided taking him on when it comes to the pandemic, choosing to deflect the blame for the deaths.

On Thursday, he again rebuffed critics' claims that his mishandling of the pandemic has caused the deaths of 166,000 Americans, telling Fox Business Network: "Nobody blames me. Look, we got hit by the China plague and we're not going to forget it. We got hit by the China plague."



Joe Biden, at a health briefing in Delaware, was accused of favouring 'locking all Americans in their basements for months on end'

Amsterdam ensures there is somewhere to go at night

By Senay Boztas in Amsterdam

AMSTERDAM has installed open air public urinals topped with planters that can harvest the urine to tackle the scourge of so-called "wild peeing".

Twelve GreenPee urinals in the Red Light District and popular nightspots of Leidseplein and Rembrandtplein, were unveiled yesterday.

By day they are closed and hard to distinguish from normal planters. But at night, they are discreetly lit and indicated by tourist guides for passers-by who find themselves caught short.

The authorities say this helps prevent unhygienic late-night public urination that can damage buildings and create unpleasant odours.

The coronavirus lockdown exposed concerns over a lack of public toilets in the centre of Amsterdam and the issue has become more pressing as the city has reopened to tourists.

Richard de Vries, inventor of the GreenPee, said: "Peeing against a wall is going to damage historic buildings. It is dirty, unhygienic and attracts flies. We came up with the idea of a planter to help keep the city green and provide something we can make fertiliser from."

Mr De Vries has supplied GreenPees to three other Dutch cities and one in Belgium. His company regularly removes the urine for processing and phosphate harvesting, while the plants are fed continuously from a rainwater reservoir and long cotton wicks. He insists the urinals are odour free.

A spokesman for Amsterdam council said it had invested £50,000 for the urinals following tests last year.

She said that the pilot scheme appeared to have been successful, "with a 49 per cent decrease in the number of people urinating publicly in the Schapensteeg alley."

One Amsterdam resident said she would not accept one in her street near the Leidseplein and would complain to the council. A German tourist said he was puzzled why anyone would choose an open-air urinal over a clean indoor public lavatory. But a French tourist called them "a good idea".

New Zealand lockdown extended by 12 days as cluster grows

By Giovanni Torre in Perth

NEW ZEALAND'S renewed coronavirus outbreak has spread beyond Auckland, the government revealed yesterday as lockdown measures were extended for another 12 days.

Despite a strict quarantine imposed in an effort to contain the virus in the

city, two cases have been detected in the North Island town of Tokoroa, 130 miles to the south, Chris Hipkins, the health minister, said.

Overall, 12 more cases of community transmission have been confirmed while a 13th is suspected, Mr Hipkins said - bringing the total number to 30.

Masked police have sealed off roads

out of Auckland in an attempt to ring-fence the outbreak, three months after New Zealand declared itself virus-free. The discovery that it has leaked out of the city is therefore a particular blow to the official strategy.

But Mr Hipkins sought to dismiss fears that Covid-19 could now be rampant elsewhere, insisting that despite

the distance, the cases were all part of the same Auckland cluster.

"We've seen no evidence of a Covid-19 case outside of Auckland that is unrelated to the cluster we are dealing with," he said.

Earlier, Jacinda Ardern, the prime minister, praised Auckland residents for the "incredible job" they have done

observing the Level 3 alert in the city. Ms Ardern said the additional 12 days would take the Level 3 lockdown in Auckland and the Level 2 measures in the rest of the country to 14 days in total, allowing for the incubation period of the virus.

"Our expectation is that by then the perimeters of the outbreak will be

identified, the outbreak isolated, and Auckland can return to Level 2."

She said signs indicated that outbreak was identified relatively early, and that while the origin of the outbreak was still unknown, contact tracing and genomic testing had found no link to the country's borders or to the managed quarantine system.

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Black Death 'wine windows' fill a niche to keep drink flowing

By Nick Squires in Rome

A TRADITION that evolved in Florence centuries ago during an outbreak of the Black Death has been given a new lease of life by the pandemic.

Bars in the city's historic centre have started reusing "wine windows", tiny holes that were carved into the walls or wooden doors of palazzi owned by noble families.

The 12-inch-high holes - known in Italian as *buchette del vino* - enabled wine to be sold without the risk of buyer or seller catching the plague, which ravaged the city in the 1630s.

An empty flask would be placed in the niche and then filled up with wine.

The customer would hand over a few coins on a metal palette and the money would immediately be sterilised in vinegar to prevent infection. The holes, protected by tiny wooden or iron doors, were manned by servants of Florence's aristocratic dynasties.

Four hundred years on, the windows

are undergoing a renaissance, enabling the safe serving of wine, coffee and even gelato as Italy tries to keep on top of Covid-19 by maintaining social distancing and health protocols.

Over the centuries, some holes were sealed up or destroyed, particularly during Second World War fighting.



Florence's 'wine windows' have been brought back into service to dispense socially distanced wine and coffee

But around 180 remain in Florence, of which 150 are found in the historic centre. There are another 95 in other towns in Tuscany, including Siena, Pisa, Pistoia, San Gimignano, Cortona and Montepulciano.

An organisation dedicated to finding and preserving them - the Wine Win-

dows Cultural Association - has even produced a map showing tourists where they can see the openings.

"It is an old tradition that you don't find anywhere else in Italy or indeed the world," Matteo Faglia, the association's president, said. "They enabled wine and sometimes food to be served safely during the plague. Now some have reopened and people are serving wine, cappuccinos and aperitifs."

Although the holes-in-the-wall became popular during the plague outbreak of the 1630s, they were initially created in the 1500s.

Cosimo I de' Medici, then the ruler of Florence, decreed that nobles could sell their own wine from their palazzi in the city without paying taxes.

They were not allowed to set up bars or tavernas, so instead created little holes in the walls. There were advantages for ordinary Florentines, too - without any taxes being levied, the wine sold from the holes was cheaper than that found in shops or taverns.

Beijing market at centre of second wave alarm reopens

By Wendy Tang in Beijing

THE wholesale food market in Beijing that was linked to a cluster of coronavirus cases in June is set to reopen today with a string of measures in place to prevent another outbreak.

Xinfadi market closed on June 13 after being linked to 335 coronavirus cases, including among workers from its beef, lamb and seafood section, raising fears of a second wave in China. Beijing reacted quickly, closing the market, banning tourism to the capital city and putting the district on a "wartime" lockdown footing.

Authorities suggested the virus had been brought in to Xinfadi on imported frozen salmon, prompting largely unrealised fears that surface transmission could be a major problem.

However, markets like Xinfadi have played a major role in transmission, including at the beginning of the outbreak in Wuhan at the end of last year, with some initial cases traced to the Huanan Seafood Market.

The pandemic has since killed 760,000 people and infected more than 21million. Xinfadi - the largest seafood and agricultural market in Asia - will only initially open at 60 per cent

capacity, selling fruits and vegetables. All buyers and sellers will have to be pre-approved via electronic registration before entering the market, and only its wholesale section will open, while its retail and underground trading hall will stay shut.

Before the pandemic, 60,000 customers a day visited the market, which supplied much of the groceries sold in

60,000

Number of daily customers at Xinfadi food market in Beijing before Covid-19. It is reopening at 60 per cent capacity

Beijing. It is not expected to reopen fully before Sept 10.

Goods entering the market will also be registered online with details including their origin, volume and quality control qualification. Personnel will confirm the details of the products before trading takes place, and deals will be recorded. The market's partial reopening came as the Chinese capital recorded seven days with no new cases of coronavirus.

Infections in South Korea at highest level since March

By Our Foreign Staff

SOUTH Korea yesterday reported 103 new virus cases, one of its biggest daily jumps in months, as officials expressed concern that infections were getting out of control in cities.

Eighty-three of the new cases were from the Seoul area, while infections were also reported in the major cities of Busan, Gwangju and Ulsan. The rise was driven by domestic transmissions, at their highest level since March 31.

Lee Jae-myung, the governor of Gyeonggi province near Seoul, ordered its 15,779 religious facilities, mostly Christian churches, to shut for two weeks to slow the spread of the virus.

Churches have emerged as major sources of infection after many failed to require worshippers to wear masks, or allowed them to sing or eat together.

Chung Sye-kyun, the prime minister, said social distancing measures could be elevated if transmissions continued to rise. That may include bans on large gatherings, shutting "high-risk" facilities such as karaoke bars and banning spectators at sports stadiums.

South Korea now has 14,873 cases, including 305 deaths.