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This is VOA news. Via remote, I'm Diane Roberts.

The World Health Organization warns the global coronavirus pandemic is accelerating. This as the worst-hit United States closed bars and beaches ahead of the Independence Day holiday.

Infections hit their highest level worldwide in the past week, WHO data showed, with chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus saying new cases had topped, quote, "160,000 on every single day." (end quote)

The grim milestone came as the European Union left Russia, Brazil and the U.S. off of its final list of nations safe enough to allow residents to enter its borders.

The EU hopes relaxing restrictions on 15 countries from Algeria to Uruguay will breathe life into its tourism sector, choked by a ban on non-essential travel since mid-March.

The Netherlands confirmed the reopening Wednesday of a tourist draw - its brothels and red-light district.

According to the United Nations, the coronavirus could cost global tourism and related sectors between 1.2 and 3.3 trillion dollars in lost revenue.

Parts of the Australian city of Melbourne suffered sharp rises in infections, spurring new stay-at-home measures.

The Palestinian Authority announced a five-day lockdown across the West Bank after a surge in confirmed cases.

The WHO says over 80 percent of all deaths in the Middle East were reported in five countries - Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Right now, there are more than 10.6 million total confirmed cases around the world, with its nearly 2.7 million of them in the hardest-hit country, the United States. More than 514,000 people around the world have died from COVID-19, nearly 128,000 in the United States. More than 5.4 million people worldwide have recovered from the respiratory illness.

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International NGO Oxfam attacked Greece's new asylum law Thursday, saying it caused "exploitation of people" and constitutes "a blatant attack" on Europe's humanitarian commitment to protect refugees.

A spokeswoman said the "situation is further aggravated" by inhumane conditions in refugee camps where people are at risk of COVID-19.

(The) Conservative prime minister came to power a year ago with the objective of reducing the number of migrants and refugees arriving in Greece, the main gateway for asylum seekers into Europe in 2019.

The government tightened its policy by speeding up asylum procedures and reducing migrants' access to health services or legal aid.

More than 33,000 asylum seekers live in squalid camps on five islands in the Aegean Sea, which were built to house a total of only 5,400 people.

U.S. President Donald Trump said Wednesday he was never told about intelligence reports alleging Russia paid Taliban militants to kill U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan because many intelligence officials did not think Moscow pays such bounties.

In an interview with Fox Business Network, Mr. Trump said, quote, "Many of the intelligence people didn't think it was something that even happened," adding "This was something that never got presented to me because it didn't rise to that level." (end quote)

Air safety regulators successfully completed three days of flight tests on the Boeing 737 MAX, a key step in re-certifying the plane. That's according to U.S. officials Wednesday.

The Federal Aviation Administration said Wednesday while the flight tests in Seattle are, quote, "an important milestone ..., a number of key tasks remain, including evaluating the data gathered during these flights." (end quote)

The MAX has been grounded worldwide since March 13, 2019, following an Ethiopian Airlines crash that killed 157 people. The catastrophe came just a few months after a Lion Air MAX crash that killed 189 people.

Wednesday is the start of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, the new North American trade deal between the three countries. The USMCA is replacing the 26-year-old North American Free Trade Agreement.

There won't be any live fireworks or star-studded concert on Parliament Hill and no crowds of tourists, either, as Canada's official birthday celebrations Wednesday are completely online for the first time ever.

And when U.S. President Donald Trump speaks at the Mount Rushmore National Memorial in South Dakota Friday, he'll stand before a crowd of thousands of people who won't be required to socially distance or wear masks despite the coronavirus pandemic.

The first fireworks show there in years will feature a patriotic display at a monument known as "the Shrine of Democracy." It sparked controversy and concern, with public health experts saying the lack of social distancing could lead to a surge in the (disease).