

# Russian Army sending hard-hit Italy coronavirus aid after Putin phone call

Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered his nation's army to deliver medical aid to Italy - the new epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic - after offering help during a Saturday phone call with Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte.

Preparations for the aid mission were underway Sunday at the Chkalovsky military airport in Moscow. Russia was loading nine colossal Il-76 cargo planes with eight mobile medical teams, medical equipment, and aerosol disinfection trucks to send to Italy's hardest-hit regions.

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Russia will also send 100 military members who specialize in virology and epidemics, Reuters reported, citing the Interfax news agency.



A military truck loads onto a Il-76 cargo plane in Chkalovsky military airport outside Moscow in preparation to deliver aid to Italy. (Alexei Yereshko, Russian Defense Ministry Press Service via AP)

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In photos released by Russian Defense Ministry Press Service, the doors of military trucks bore signs with heart-shaped Russian and Italian flags that read: “From Russia with love” in Russian, Italian and English.

Putin’s offer came on the same day Italy recorded its biggest spike in deaths from the COVID-19 virus of nearly 800, taking the death toll to 4,825 – the highest in the world – while the number of infections rose to 53,578. The exploding caseload has overwhelmed Italy’s doctors and nurses and left medical equipment in short supply.



A sign on a Russian military vehicle reads: “From Russia with love” in several languages. (Alexei Yereshko, Russian Defense Ministry Press Service via AP)

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Russia has so far reported very few confirmed coronavirus cases, noting just 306 infections and one death.

### **ITALIAN OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALISTS PROVIDE GRIM VIEW OF CORONAVIRUS-HIT REGION: ‘IT’S A WAR AT HOME’**

As the U.S. and Europe struggle to contain the virus, nations once viewed as rivals are stepping up in the global coronavirus response.

Last week, Chinese President XI Jinping pledged to help Italy, moving quickly to

send experts and desperately needed medical equipment, including millions of masks.

China's rush to aid struggling countries, including Pakistan, Serbia, Liberia, the Philippines, and the Czech Republic, is seen by many as the communist nation's attempt to defuse criticism that it mishandled the viral outbreak when it began in Wuhan late last year.

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The global pandemic has sickened at least 311,000 worldwide, killing 13,407 as of March 22.

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*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

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