



This combination of 20 pictures created on Sunday shows graffiti decorating metal shutter doors of closed businesses in Madrid, during a national lockdown to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 disease. Spain's daily coronavirus death toll dropped to 288 today, the lowest since March 20, as the country eased its lockdown to allow children outside for the first time in six weeks.—AFP

'We're going out!': Spanish kids reclaim streets after weeks indoors

After six weeks stuck at home, Spain's children were allowed out Sunday to run, play or go for a walk as the government eased one of the world's toughest coronavirus lockdowns. Spain is among the hardest hit countries, with a death toll running at more than 23,000, putting it behind only the United States and Italy despite stringent restrictions imposed from March 14. But unlike other countries, Spain's children were kept indoors, with only adults allowed to leave the house to buy food, medicine, briefly walk the dog or seek urgent medical care. On Sunday, Spanish children took to the streets of Madrid to enjoy their newfound freedom.



Jose, 45, pushes her son Pol's stroller as she walks with her family.



A woman jumps rope with a girl in Valencia.



Joan, 45, chases his daughters Ines, 11, and Mar, 9, as they play in the street on Sunday, in Barcelona, during a national lockdown to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 disease.—AFP photos

Some rollerbladed while others rode bikes or pushed toy prams around, many wearing small masks to cover their faces. "It has been very good for me to get out," said six-year-old Ricardo after a runaround in Madrid with his younger sister. "We played hide and seek, we raced. We found a ladybug that was lost and we put it in among the ants." "Some parents took precautions, dressing their kids with protective gear before going out. "They're all properly equipped with masks and gloves," said Miguel Lopez, father of two children aged six and three, and who lives in an apartment in northwest Madrid. "It's like a day out for them, it's the most interesting thing for them in a month," Lopez told AFP.

'Super excited'

Alvaro Paredes, seven, and his brother Javier, four, were just getting ready for their big adventure. "We

are going to go out in an hour's time, going about a kilometer (0.6 miles) on scooter or bicycle to do a tour around our neighborhood," their mother Inmaculada Paredes said. "They are super excited, very, very impatient. They were up at 6:30 am, saying "We're going out, We're going out!," she said.

From Sunday a maximum of three children under 14 years will be able to go out once a day, for one hour between 9:00 am (0700 GMT) and 9:00 pm, accompanied by one parent — and no further than one kilometre from their home. Health Minister Salvador Illa on Friday said it would be "a first step towards easing" the lockdown after earlier insisting that people be very prudent "because the health of the nation is at stake". The restriction on children had come under increasing criticism in Spain, with specialists warning of the danger it posed for their health and mental wellbeing. Last week one of Spain's deputy prime ministers Pablo Iglesias apologised for keeping them at home for six weeks, acknowledging it was "not at all easy" for them and saying thank you.

'Common sense'

The government's initial plan to allow children to accompany adults only on their rare authorised trips, for example to supermarkets, satisfied no one and prompted a hasty retreat. "All our common sense tells us that it is safe for the children," said mother Paredes. "If I can go to a supermarket, which is an enclosed space, then going for a walk (in the open) has got to be safer." For both her and Miguel Lopez, this easing of the rules would have been welcome earlier but they understand the caution of the authorities, desperate to avoid any resurgence of the disease. "Many people have been really irresponsible," Lopez said.



Children run as they play in a park in Seville.



A man and a child wearing face masks, ride bicycles in Seville.



A child plays football with his father at Can Pere Antoni Beach in Palma de Mallorca.



Two children play on the Portixol Beach in Palma de Mallorca.

Acclaimed Swedish author Per Olov Enquist dies aged 85

Per Olov Enquist, one of Sweden's most acclaimed authors who wrote "The Visit of the Royal Physician," has died aged 85, his family told Swedish media on Sunday. The patriarch of 20th century Scandinavian literature, Enquist is known for powerful stories that weave his own melancholic life into the dark side of history. In his more than 20 novels, plays and essays, he drew heavily on his own experience as an oppressed child in a strictly religious home, as an athlete, a journalist and a destructive alcoholic, his leftwing convictions filling his writings. Born in 1934 in Hjoggböle in Sweden's far north, his books — including "The Crystal Eye" (1961), "The Parable Book" (2013), "The Magnetist's Fifth Winter" (1964) and "The March of the Musicians" (1978) — have been translated into a dozen languages. He won the 2001 August Prize, Swedish literature's top honour, for "The Visit of the Royal Physician", which earned him broad international acclaim and tells the story of a romance between the physician of the mad Danish King Christian VII and the queen.



Per Olov Enquist at his home in Stockholm in 2011.—GETTY IMAGES

Enquist, known in Sweden by his initials P.O., won a second August award for his autobiography "A Different Life" (2008), its name an homage to "A Life" by August Strindberg, the father of modern Swedish literature. "P.O. Enquist's importance for Swedish cultural life since the 1960s can't be exaggerated. He was the model for the socially-engaged poet who influenced generations of younger writers. It feels empty and unthinkable that he is gone," wrote Björn Wiman, culture editor of the Dagens Nyheter newspaper, on Sunday. His publisher Norstedts also posted a memorial on its website: "Few have, like him, inspired other writers, renewed the documentary novel, revitalized Swedish drama and touched readers for more than half a century."

'Didn't give up'

The process of writing "A Different Life", he said, allowed him to work through and leave behind painful memories of sleeping in a bed meant for his still-born brother, of the void left by a father who died when he was not yet a year old, and of a strict mother who pushed him to invent sins to confess. Known for his Gregory Peck-like frown and silver crown in his later years, Enquist broke free from his family, competing in high jump in high school before attending Uppsala University, where he discovered journalism and writing.

He just missed qualifying for the Rome Olympics in the high jump in 1960. But as a journalist he covered the 1972 Munich Olympics when Palestinian militants took hostage and then killed members of the Israeli team. Enquist's transition to adulthood was scarred by depression, self-doubt and existential questions. He was 18 years old when Swedish author Stig Dagerman, whom Enquist admired, published "Our Need for Consolation is Insatiable" (1952).—AFP