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Spain in talks to launch EU-funded recovery plan in January 2021, says minister

Madrid.—Spain's government is negotiating with its EU partners to get the disbursements of European Union recovery funds as early as possible so it can launch its recovery plan in January 2021, Economy Minister Nadia Calvino said yesterday. Spain is due to receive

around 140 billion euros (\$166 billion) in grants and loans out of the European Union's 750-billion-euro coronavirus recovery package.

"Negotiations are still ongoing in Brussels, so obviously we are doing our utmost to accelerate this process so that we can start

the implementation of the recovery plan on January 1 2021," Calvino told Bloomberg TV yesterday.

Separately, Calvino said the Spanish government is "in no hurry to divest" its stake in Spanish bank Bankia, which is in the process of merging with rival Caixabank.

Sanitising-gel poisoning cases soar among Spanish children amid pandemic

The number of Spanish children treated for poisoning after ingesting hand-sanitising gels has rocketed as the product has become ubiquitous during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Spanish National Toxicological and Forensic Institute said yesterday the total reported intoxications from those gels so far this year, at 874, was almost 10 times the number reported in all of 2019.

Children, especially toddlers, accounted for almost two-thirds of the cases. Most of them had swallowed the gel, while a much smaller percentage got it in their eyes, or had been intoxicated after inhaling the product.

"Most common symptoms were digestive tract irrita-

tion, vomiting, diarrhoea, coughing, red eyes, tears or blurring vision," the institute said in a report. About 80% of the cases had symptoms that "reversed in a short time".

The four or five cases of serious gel poisoning in the country involved only adults, according to a spokeswoman for the Justice Ministry, which oversees the institute. No fatalities were reported, she said.

In Spain, sanitising-gel dispensers are now available at all train stations, stores, schools and public bathrooms, where they are free of charge, as well as in private homes and cars.

With close to 900,000 registered COVID-19 cases and more than 33,000 deaths, Spain is the hardest-hit

country in Western Europe, and authorities have imposed restrictive measures in several regions, including Madrid, to curb a surge in contagion.

Various health institutions around the world have warned the public of the need to be cautious when using and stocking hand-sanitising gels as they always contain a toxic disinfecting agent, such as methyl alcohol.

In August, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration cautioned consumers against packing hand sanitizers in children's food pouches and beverage bottles. The FDA also warned against the use of food-flavoured hand sanitizers due to the risk of their ingestion by children.



Closing down for 15 days from tonight.

LAST ORDERS IN CATALONIA

Madrid.—The Spanish region of Catalonia, which includes the city of Barcelona, ordered bars and restaurants to close for 15 days from tonight onwards and limited the numbers of people allowed in shops to try to curb a surge in coronavirus cases. With close to 900,000 registered cases and more than 33,000 deaths, Spain has become the pandemic's hotspot in Western Europe. The capital Madrid and nearby suburbs were put on partial lockdown last week. Bars and restaurants in Catalonia will only be allowed to offer take-away services and delivery, acting regional chief Pere Aragonés told reporters yesterday. "We need to act today to avoid a total lockdown in the coming weeks ... The situation is very worrying," Aragonés said.