

French auto sales plummet on virus shock

1 April 2020

French new car sales in March plunged more than 72 percent and could be down 20 percent for the full year as the coronavirus outbreak sinks the market, industry figures showed Wednesday.

Western Europe was likely to be the worst hit, Moody's said, with a fall of 21 percent, followed by the United States with a drop of 15 percent, China down 10 percent and Japan eight percent.

With France under a strict virus lockdown since the middle of the month, all non-essential businesses have been closed, including [auto dealers](#). © 2020 AFP

Most carmakers have, in turn, closed plants in France and around the world in an effort to limit the damage from the pandemic.

"It is historic. We have never seen a fall like this," said Francois Roudier, spokesman for the French [auto](#) manufacturers' committee (CCFA), an industry group.

In March, French new car sales fell 72.2 percent to 62,668 units compared with March 2019, it said.

Roudier said that for the first half of the year, based on estimates by both French and [foreign companies](#), "we should be down about 30 percent, which would bring us to a decline of 20 percent for 2020."

"We are going to finish the year with between 1.7 and 1.8 million new car sales in France," he said.

That forecast was based on the assumption that the lockdown would end and normal activity be resumed at the end of April or the beginning of May, he said.

"If that gets put back, then the forecast could be even lower," the CCFA spokesman said, adding that "even if there is a strong recovery... we will not be able to fully make up for this considerable drop."

Last week, Moody's sharply downgraded its [forecast](#) for global auto sales from a projected decline of 2.5 percent this year to a much steeper drop of 14 percent.

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