

NEWS / ISLAM

Coronavirus is changing the way Muslims worship across the world

Saudi bans Umrah pilgrimage, Iran cancels Friday prayers and Singapore Muslims are urged to bring own mats to mosques.

4 Mar 2020



Members of a medical team spray disinfectant to sanitise the outdoor space at Imam Reza's holy shrine, following the coronavirus outbreak, in Mashhad, Iran on February 27, 2020 [West Asia News Agency via Reuters]

People around the world are avoiding crowded places, cutting back on inessential travel and taking precautionary measures such as working from home to avoid catching the new coronavirus.

Several countries have also urged their citizens to change the way they greet one another, or celebrate certain festivities.

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Religious authorities, meanwhile, are advising people how to pray or mark holy days without risking spreading COVID-19 further. The virus, which originated in China, has so far infected more than 93,000 people globally and killed more than 3,000.

Here are some examples of the new measures and advice from Muslim countries, organisations and Islamic sites for worshippers and pilgrims.

Saudi bans 'Umrah' pilgrimage, stops foreigners visiting Islam's holiest sites

The kingdom on Wednesday banned "Umrah" for residents and citizens, according to the state-run Saudi Press Agency (SPA).

Umrah, which can be completed in a few hours, is a pilgrimage that can be undertaken at any time of year, unlike the much more intensive and time-consuming Hajj - one of the five pillars of Islam performed during a few specific days each year.

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The move was in line with the "precautionary measures taken by Saudi authorities to prevent the spread of the virus" in the Gulf state, SPA said.

Last week, Saudi Arabia said it was preventing foreigners from reaching the holy city of Mecca and the Kaaba, the building at the centre of the Great Mosque. It also said travel was suspended to Prophet Muhammad's mosque in Medina.

This year's Hajj, which usually brings about three million people to Mecca, is expected to take place from July 28 to August 2. Authorities have not yet announced any restrictive measures; more than 60,000 people have applied to participate in this year's event already.

The kingdom has two reported cases of coronavirus.

Iran halts Friday prayers in major cities

Iran is struggling to contain the virus, with a rising number of cases and deaths each day. As of Wednesday evening, those totalled 2,922 and 92, respectively.

Friday prayers in all provincial capitals have been halted.

"This disease is a widespread one," Iranian President Hassan Rouhani told his cabinet, according to a transcript. "It encompasses almost all of our provinces and is, in a sense, a global disease that many countries in the world have become infected with, and we must work together to tackle this problem as quickly as possible."

Singapore Muslim leader advises worshippers to use own prayer mats, avoid shaking hands

According to The Straits Times, Masagos Zulkifli, a minister in charge of Muslim affairs in Singapore, has advised Muslims to bring their own prayer mats to mosques and refrain from shaking hands with one another.

"In these circumstances, we will not be shaking hands. But if you do, wash your hands, and then make sure you don't touch your face. This is just a precaution for many of us who always forget that," he said.

While it remains logistically difficult to take worshippers' temperatures at mosques, some of which attract thousands of people, Masagos said Muslims should stay at home if they showed any [coronavirus symptoms](#).

There have been more than 100 cases of coronavirus in Singapore, and the majority of patients have recovered.

UK group calls on Muslim institutions to follow hygiene advice

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), one of the United Kingdom's largest Muslim umbrella organisations, has [called](#) on mosques and Islamic schools to "keep your congregations safe", by following the government's advice.

"Much of this advice, and an emphasis on cleanliness and hygiene is in line with Islamic tradition. Abu Malik Al-Ash`ari (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Messenger of Allah (Peace Be Upon Him) said: 'Purity is half of iman (faith)'," MCB said on its website, referring to a saying of the Prophet Muhammad.

It advised madrassas, or schools, to encourage handwashing and said mosques should have enough soap and hand sanitisers available, especially near ablution areas.

The number of people infected in the UK has risen to 87.

Tajikistan asks Muslims to pray at home

Tajikistan, which so far has no reported cases, has suspended Friday prayers.

The Muslim-majority country of nine million has shut its border to neighbours China and Afghanistan as

NEWS / HEALTH

Coronavirus cases surpass 100,000 globally: Live updates

Outbreak reaches worrying new milestone, driven by new cases outside China, as governments further tighten restrictions.

by **Ted Regencia, Fidelis Mbah & Usaid Siddiqui**

06 Mar 2020 16:20 GMT

More than 100,000 people have been diagnosed with the [coronavirus](#) disease globally, according to Johns Hopkins University - with at least 3,015 deaths in [China](#) and 267 fatalities in other parts of the globe, most of them in Italy and Iran.

At least 1,200 of the new infections are in Iran in just the past 24 hours, the country's biggest jump since the outbreak began. Iran's health ministry on Friday added that 124 people have died.

More:

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In France, 200 new COVID-19 cases were confirmed overnight, while India and South Korea also reported an increase in the number of infections.

Additionally, the death toll in the [United States](#) from the coronavirus rose to 12 when King County in the state of Washington reported the latest death on Thursday.

Here are all the latest updates.

Friday, March 6

15:50 GMT - EU ministers urge members to share anti-virus gear

Smaller EU member states raised the alarm Friday after Germany, France and the Czech Republic blocked the export of some medical supplies that could help slow the novel coronavirus outbreak.

EU health ministers were meeting to plan a coordinated response to the epidemic, but Germany has banned exports of face masks and gloves and France has requisitioned all its own stocks.

"There are legal grounds that make such measures possible, but these kind of unilateral measures first have to be notified to the union," EU crisis management commissioner Jenaz Lenarcic said.

15:40 GMT - Trump visit to CDC cancelled after virus concern

President Donald Trump's visit to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta has been called off because of concerns that a staff member may have been infected by the coronavirus.

Trump told reporters concerns were raised Thursday about "one person who was potentially infected" who worked at the CDC.

"Because of the one person they didn't want me going," he added, explaining why a planned stop at the agency, which is working with state and local officials to help combat the spread of the new virus, was left off his schedule.



Togo confirmed its first case of the novel coronavirus after a 42-year-old woman tested positive following her return from a trip to Benin, Germany, France and Turkey.

The presidency in the West African nation of eight million people said the patient, who lives in the capital Lome with her family, was "currently isolated in a treatment centre for infectious diseases" after testing positive on Thursday.

14:32 GMT - Trump signs \$8.3 bln spending bill to boost coronavirus response

United States President Donald Trump signed an emergency spending bill for \$8.3 billion to ramp up the nation's response to the coronavirus, providing funds for state and local officials to combat the spread of infections as the number of cases grows in the United States.

The funding measure includes over \$3 billion for research and development of vaccines, test kits and medical treatments, \$2.2 billion to aid public health activities on prevention, preparedness and response, and \$1.25 billion to help international efforts aimed at reining in the virus.

14:05 GMT - Number of confirmed cases surpasses 100,000: Reuters

The number of people infected by the new coronavirus surpassed 100,000 globally, according to a tally by Reuters news agency based on statements from health ministries and government officials across the world.

14:00 GMT - Two British Airways staff test positive for coronavirus

Two British Airways staff members have tested positive for coronavirus and have been isolated and recovering at home, the airline said.

"Public Health England (PHE) has confirmed that two members of our staff have tested positive for the COVID-19 virus," British Airways said in a statement.

This is [Usaid Siddiqui](#) taking over from my colleague [Fidelis Mbah](#).


11:14 GMT - European stocks plunge over virus scare

European stock markets plunged further on heightened panic over the coronavirus and its predicted devastating damage to world economic growth.

Paris slumped 3.9 percent, Frankfurt and Milan each tumbled 3.7 percent, Madrid shed 3.4 percent and London retreated 3.3 percent by 10:30 GMT.

#Coronavirus updates:

- *US death toll rises to 12*
- *South Korea reports 518 new cases*
- *China reports 143 new cases, 30 deaths*
- *Global economic losses could reach \$347bn*

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— *Al Jazeera English (@AJEnglish)*
March 6, 2020

11:10 GMT - Tokyo Olympics hold test event minus fans

Tokyo Olympics organisers have held a test event amid fears of the spread of coronavirus.

They allowed a sport climbing event on Friday to go ahead, with a few restrictions: no fans and no top athletes.

09:50 GMT - Vatican confirms first case

The Vatican has reported its first coronavirus case, saying it had suspended outpatient services at its health clinic after a patient tested positive.

Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni told journalists on Friday that the clinic, which has some 1,000 residents, will be deep cleaned.

09:39 GMT - Cameroon, Serbia record first cases

Cameroon has confirmed its first case of coronavirus after a 58-year-old French citizen tested positive to the virus.

The health ministry said the man, who arrived in the capital, Yaounde, on February 24, has been quarantined in the city's central hospital.

In Serbia, health minister Zlatibor Loncar reported on Friday that a 43-year-old man became the first person in Serbia to be infected with the coronavirus.

09:12 GMT - India coronavirus cases jump to 31

The number of coronavirus cases in India has increased sharply from six to 31 this week, the health ministry announced on Friday.

Authorities in the capital, New Delhi, have also ordered the closure of primary schools until March 31 to prevent local transmission.

Click here to read [what you need to know](#) about coronavirus in India.

08:29 GMT - Travelling during coronavirus outbreak

The rapid spread of COVID-19 around the globe has thrown the international travel industry into chaos.

07:28 GMT - Global economic losses could reach \$347bn

The new coronavirus outbreak could result in global economic losses of up to \$347bn, according to a report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

The minimum losses are projected at \$77bn, or 0.1 percent of global gross domestic product (GDP) while the maximum losses represent 0.4 percent of global GDP, the ADB said.

This is [Fidelis Mbah](#) taking over from my colleague Ted Regencia.

04:15 GMT - South Korea vows 'reciprocal' countermeasures

South Korea said it will consider countermeasures to Japan's "unjust, unacceptable" travel restrictions barring visitors from areas which have been hard hit by the coronavirus epidemic.

The presidential National Security Council met after Japan said it would bar arrivals from highly affected areas in South Korea and Iran and order a two-week quarantine for those from other regions.

"It is unacceptable that the Japanese government took such an unjust action without prior consultations with us, and we will explore necessary countermeasures based on principles of reciprocity," the council said in a statement.

04:15 GMT - Philippines reports two new infections

Philippine Health Secretary Francisco Duque III announced two new coronavirus infections, bringing the total confirmed cases to five.

One of the patients had reportedly traveled to Japan, while the other person "has no known history of travel outside the country". The second patient reported on Friday reportedly frequented a mosque in Metro Manila before the infection was confirmed.

While there are only five confirmed cases in the Philippines, more than 80 Filipinos working abroad have contracted the disease, most of whom were working on board the Diamond Princess cruise ship.

03:47 GMT - Seoul urges Tokyo to drop new entry rules

South Korean Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun on Friday described Japan's latest entry restrictions against South Koreans following the coronavirus outbreak as "very regrettable".

Speaking at a meeting in Seoul, Chung urged Tokyo to withdraw the "excessive and unreasonable" measures against South Korean travellers.

As of Friday, there are an estimated 6,284 coronavirus infections reported in South Korea, and 80,552 cases in China.

02:12 GMT - South Korea reports 518 new cases

South Korean health authorities reported 518 new cases of the coronavirus on Friday, bringing to 6,284 the total number of infections nationwide, according to Yonhap news agency.

Yonhap also quoted the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as saying that 42 people, mostly elderly with underlying illnesses, have died.

Most of the cases of infections were from the southeastern city of Daegu, a city of 2.5 million people.

01:32 GMT - China reports 143 new cases, 30 deaths

China's National Health Commission reported on Friday 30 new coronavirus deaths and 143 new infections as of the end of Thursday.

At least 29 of the new deaths and 126 new cases were from the province of Hubei, the epicentre of the infections in China.

Across China, the total number of deaths has reached 3,042 with the number of infections hitting 80,552.

00:50 GMT - Beijing reports 4 new coronavirus cases from Italy



The city now has a total of 422 cases. Coronavirus cases are now rising across the globe at a more rapid rate than inside China.

Across China, the cases have now reached 80,565 with 3,015 deaths, according to a World Health Organization or WHO report on Thursday.

00:25 GMT - US state of Maryland confirms three cases

Governor Larry Hogan of the US state of Maryland has announced that three people from the state have been infected with the coronavirus.

In a statement posted on social media, Hogan said the three individuals contracted the disease while travelling overseas. He said they are in "good condition".

We have been actively preparing for this situation over the last several weeks across all levels of government. I encourage all Marylanders not to panic, but to take this seriously and to stay informed as we continue to provide updates.

*— Governor Larry Hogan
(@GovLarryHogan) March 5, 2020*

23:09 GMT Thursday - French legislator hospitalised after contracting coronavirus

Reuters news agency is reporting that a member of France's National Assembly has been hospitalised in intensive care after contracting coronavirus.

France's lower house of Parliament made the announcement late on Thursday, but did not identify the legislator.

Two other people working in the dining hall of the assembly were also infected.

France has so far reported 423 cases of the virus as of late on Thursday, up by 138 in one day, according to the national health service. There have been seven deaths so far in France.

Click here to [read all the updates from March 5.](#)

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