

Lebanon confirms first coronavirus case as death toll hits 4 in Iran



- Found in 45-year-old Lebanese woman who travelled from Qom in Iran
- Kuwait Airways announced it would suspend all flights to Iran as Kuwaitis were advised not to travel to Qom

BEIRUT: New coronavirus cases surged across the Middle East on Friday, after a rapid spread in Iran, where authorities say the death toll from the virus has hit four, prompting alarm and travel bans.

Since December, the SARS-like virus has killed more than 2,200 people in China, the epidemic's epicenter.

In the Middle East, two elderly men in Iran were the first confirmed deaths from the virus, which has also spread to the UAE, Egypt, Israel and Lebanon.

Iran's Health Ministry on Friday reported two more deaths among 13 new diagnosed cases of the COVID-19 virus, doubling the total number of deaths in the country.

Hours later, Lebanon confirmed the first case. "The plane that arrived from the Iranian city of Qom was carrying 150 passengers," a source from the medical emergency team that was formed to deal with the case told Arab News.

"Lebanon received a warning from its embassy in Tehran about a plane carrying potential coronavirus cases, coming from the region in which Iranian authorities have monitored several infections," the source said.

"A medical team hurried to the plane, Mahan Air flight W5115, as soon as it landed in Beirut on Thursday night. Passengers were all tested, and as 45-year-old Souad Sakr showed symptoms, she was taken directly to isolation and provided with all the medical requirements."

Israel on Friday also confirmed its first case in a citizen who flew home from Japan.

Kuwait Airways announced it would suspend all flights to Iran. Kuwaitis were advised not to travel to Qom.



Young women wearing protective masks walk outside Beirut's Rafik Hariri University Hospital, where a woman is treated for coronavirus, on Feb. 21, 2020. (AFP / JOSEPH EID)

The UAE said a Filipino and a Bangladeshi were infected with the virus, bringing to 11 the number of cases in the country. More cases monitored

The Lebanese team is monitoring two other potential cases. Lebanese Health Minister Hamad Hassan told a press conference: “A floor in the government hospital in Beirut was allocated to receive any potential cases. There’s no need for excessive panic.

“The medical team is following up on passengers who were taken to their homes, and any person who shows symptoms will be taken to the hospital.

“People who arrived from Iran less than 14 days ago are asked to remain isolated until we make sure they haven’t been infected,” he added.

The COVID-19 outbreak first appeared in Iran on Wednesday.

Tehran has now confirmed a total of four deaths and 18 infections by the SARS-like virus, which first emerged in China in late December.

Thousands of Lebanese travel to Iran every year to visit Shiite holy sites in Qom and other cities.

(With AFP)
