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Qatar reports first coronavirus case in citizen who was in Iran

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Qatar has reported its first case of the new coronavirus as infections continue to rise outside of China, where the rapidly spreading virus was first detected late last year.

The Gulf state's health ministry said on Saturday the patient is a 36-year-old Qatari man who returned recently from Iran, the region's worst-hit country. He is in a stable condition, the ministry added.

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The state-run Qatar News Agency (QNA) reported that the patient travelled to Qatar's capital, Doha, on a government-chartered plane and has been in quarantine with other evacuees.

All those who were brought back on Thursday by the Qatari government will be quarantined in a local hotel for 14 days.

"A hotel has been set up as a quarantine facility to be used by the Qatari citizens for a 14-day period and will be cared for and monitored by medical. Additionally, they have also been provided with all necessities," the Government Communications Office said.

Cases in the region

At least 2,900 people have died and more than 85,000 have been infected worldwide since the virus was first detected in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019. The vast majority of infections have been in China but more daily cases are now logged outside the country, with Iran, South Korea and Italy emerging as hotspots.

With Qatar reporting its first infection, Saudi Arabia is the only Gulf country not to have signalled any coronavirus case. The kingdom recently halted travel to holy sites, including Mecca and Medina.

The country most affected by the outbreak in the region is Iran, with 43 deaths and nearly 600 confirmed infections as of Saturday, according to authorities.

The majority of infections in other Gulf countries were diagnosed in people who had visited Iran or who came into contact with people who had been there. The only deaths reported so far in the region are in Iran.

The United Arab Emirates advised banks to reschedule loans and reduce fees and commissions on Saturday as part of measures to mitigate the economic effects of the coronavirus outbreak.

The UAE is a regional business hub and major transit point for passengers travelling to China and other destinations in Asia.

The Emirati education ministry also announced the suspension of nursery school classes.

The UAE was the first country in the Middle East to register a case of the disease, known as COVID-19.

Meanwhile, neighbouring Kuwait called on its citizens to avoid travelling over concerns about the spread of the coronavirus.

Kuwait has reported 45 coronavirus infections, Bahrain 38 and the UAE 21, of whom five recovered.

Oman has reported six, of whom one recovered, and Iraq has reported eight infections.