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Algeria confirms first coronavirus case amid global spike

The New Arab

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Algeria's health ministry said an Italian man who had entered the country earlier this month has been diagnosed with the coronavirus.

An Italian man who entered the country on February 17 was diagnosed with the virus, also known as COVID-19, and has been quarantined, according to the country's health minister.

No further information was provided, however the ministry warned Algerians to be cautious with content shared online.

Cases in the region have spiked this week with Iran announcing more than 15 confirmed deaths due to the virus, more than in any country other than China.

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The Iranian government has pledged greater transparency after a lawmaker alleged that the clerical regime was playing down the outbreak and that the toll could be as high as 50.

Iran's deputy health minister and another member of parliament

also confirmed a positive diagnosis for the novel coronavirus,

Deputy Health Minister Iraj Harirchi coughed accassionally and appeared to be sweating when he appeared in Tehran at a government press conference on Monday to dispel claims of a high death toll from the virus.

Lawmaker Ahmad Amirabadi Farahani had alleged that 50 people had died from the virus in the Shia holy city of Qom alone - a figure far above the official number of nine at the time of his statement.

Harirchi denied the politician's claim and said he would resign if the number proved to be true.

In a video broadcast on state television, the deputy minister admitted he had been infected and pledged to overcome the virus.

According to the health ministry, most of the deaths and infections outside Qom are among people who have recently visited the holy city.

Despite being Iran's epicentre of the outbreak, Qom has yet to be quarantined. The virus has since spread to the capital, as well as Alborz, Gilan, Mazandaran, Fars, Khorasan Razavi and Qeshm island.

A number of countries in the Middle East region have grounded flights and shuttered their borders with the Islamic Republic in recent days.

Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman all reported their first cases of the virus this week.

On Tuesday, the Lebanese government banned nationals from taking part in pilgrimages to Iran and other Middle East countries after a citizen tested positive upon return from the Islamic

Republic.

Lebanese Muslims regularly fly to Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia for religious trips, including Mecca for Haj or Umrah.

Shia Muslims also regularly travel to Iran's holy city of Qom for pilgrimage.

[Turkey](#) said it had shut its borders with Iran on Sunday, but Turkish Airlines continues to operate flights from Tehran to Istanbul restricted to Turkish passengers.

A Tehran-Istanbul flight was redirected to Ankara's Esenboga airport on Tuesday after 17 passengers on board presented with symptoms of the coronavirus.

No cases of the virus have been detected in Turkey as of yet.

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