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Colombia confirms first coronavirus case

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BOGOTA, Colombia

After dozens of discarded cases in several cities in the country, Colombia recorded its first confirmed case of coronavirus, the Health Ministry said in a statement on Friday, as the disease continues to spread its tentacles in South America.

The patient is a 19-year-old woman who had traveled to Milan.

"The national, who arrived from Milan (Italy), showed symptoms and went to the health services where samples were taken for the analysis. The National Institute of Health confirmed positive test results," said the statement posted on Twitter.

The woman reportedly arrived in the country on Feb. 26 and went to the clinic on March 2.

According to the statement, the Health Minister Fernando Ruiz has been meeting with health authorities "to activate the contingency plans in order to face this challenge."

Officially, the government declared that "the preparation phase is over and the phase of containment of the coronavirus is activated in the national territory".

Health authorities said that the country has been preparing for more than eight weeks to face the arrival of the virus.

South American neighbors Peru, Brazil, Ecuador, Argentina and Chile also announced their first confirmed cases this week.

The new coronavirus emerged in Wuhan, China, last December and has now spread to more than 80 countries.

The global death toll is nearing 3,500, with around 100,000 confirmed cases, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

The WHO, which had declared the outbreak an international health emergency, recently updated the global risk level to "very high".

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