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Two die of coronavirus in Iran, first fatalities in Middle East

by Arwa Ibrahim 20 Feb 2020

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Tehran, Iran - Two elderly people have died in [Iran](#) after testing positive for the [new coronavirus](#), according to health officials.

The deaths on Wednesday were the outbreak's first fatalities in the [Middle East](#).

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"Two elderly people have died due to [coronavirus](#) in the city of Qom, south of Tehran," Alireza Vahabzadeh, an adviser to Iran's health minister, told Al Jazeera on Wednesday.

"The two victims had suffered acute lung infections due to

their infection with the coronavirus," he added.

Earlier in the day, Kianoush Jahanpour, spokesman for Iran's ministry of health, said the two people had tested positive for the virus in preliminary results and died due to immune deficiencies and old age.

There was no immediate information about the gender and the exact age of the victims.

COVID-19, as the virus is officially known, was first detected in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late December. It has since killed more than 2,000 people in mainland [China](#) and infected more than 75,000 globally. The two victims in Iran were the country's first cases and only the seventh and eighth death caused by the virus outside mainland China.

Last month, the United Arab Emirates was the first country in the Middle East to report cases of the new coronavirus.

Emergency units set up

Meanwhile, during a visit earlier on Wednesday to Qom to assess the situation, Qasem Jan-Babaei, Iran's deputy health minister, told local news agencies that the ministry had set up emergency units for the treatment of contagious diseases in the holy city.

"We urge people to avoid shaking hands and kissing, to observe personal hygiene and preferably avoid crowded places," said Babaei, adding that there was no reason to panic.

"There have been no reports of coronavirus in other cities

so far, but there is a possibility that cases may also arise in other cities."

Ali Gholizadeh, an Iranian public health policy researcher at the University of Science and Technology of China, said Iran's health ministry was prepared to manage the virus, but added that the victims' relatives should be quarantined "until we are sure they are not infected".

"People in Iran should not panic," he stressed, citing the virus's extremely low mortality rate.

Earlier this week, the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) said the coronavirus caused only mild disease in four out of five people infected.

Citing Chinese data, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said 14 percent of those who get it suffer from severe complications such as pneumonia, five percent are in critical condition and two percent die from the disease.