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Cuba confirms first COVID-19 death. One American is also sick on the island

By Pedro Portal

5-6 minutes

Carlos Gimenez wants to suspend flights from Cuba after reports of 3 cases of coronavirus in the country

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The Cuban government confirmed on Wednesday the first death from the coronavirus on the island, a 61-year-old Italian tourist who was in critical condition.

A 77-year-old American also contracted the virus, the Ministry of Health said in a statement [published in the official newspaper, Granma](#).

The Ministry said the Italian tourist, from the Lombardy region in northern Italy, died due to “complications of his illness.”

Authorities also confirmed three new cases of COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus: two Cubans and the American who arrived on the island on March 8 from California.

According to the ministry’s statement, the American man began showing symptoms a week after arriving, when he was staying in Trinidad, a city in the center of the country. He was then admitted to a hospital in nearby Villa Clara, and “continues to evolve satisfactorily so far.”

Previously, Cuban authorities had said they had [13 travelers from the United States under medical observation](#).

A 67-year-old Cuban woman who arrived on March 11 from New Jersey, and a 25-year-old Cuban man who returned to the island from Madrid on March 8, also contracted the virus. Both reside in the city of Santa Clara, in Villa Clara province.

With the three new cases, the count of coronavirus

confirmed patients in the country rose to 10.

The government said it is screening travelers and has canceled art and music shows and sporting events to avoid crowds. Still, it has not implemented the more drastic measures seen in other countries in the region. Schools and public places remain open, and no travel restrictions have been announced, a policy that has drawn sharp criticism from the population.

Health officials appeared on state media on Tuesday to send a reassuring message.

“The quarantine is established depending on the transmission, and at this time, it is not justified. We are working not to reach that moment,” said Dr. Francisco Durán García, national director of epidemiology in the Ministry of Public Health.

“When there is no obvious transmission, and you close schools, it creates extra stress which weakens the immune response,” the official said.

The Cuban government also allowed a British cruise ship, which had been stranded in the Caribbean for days with five people with COVID-10 and another forty in isolation, [to dock at one of the island's ports](#).

The passengers of the MS Braemer, a ship owned by Fred Olsen Cruise Lines, started to disembark Wednesday afternoon at the port of Mariel, west of the capital, to be transferred directly to the José Martí International Airport, in Havana. From there, four British Airways planes will take

them back to the United Kingdom, in an effort coordinated between the two governments.

Follow Nora Gámez Torres on Twitter: @ngameztorres



Cuba confirmed 10 cases of coronavirus infection and the first related death on Monday. (YAMIL LAGE/Getty Images/TNS) YAMIL LAGE Getty Images/TNS





Nora Gámez Torres estudió periodismo y comunicación en La Habana y Londres. Tiene un doctorado en sociología y desde el 2014 cubre temas cubanos para el Nuevo Herald y el Miami Herald. También reporta sobre la política de Estados Unidos hacia América Latina. Su trabajo ha sido reconocido con premios de Florida Society of News Editors y Society for Profesional Journalists. Nora Gámez Torres is the Cuba/U.S.-Latin American policy reporter for el Nuevo Herald and the Miami Herald. She studied journalism and media and communications in Havana and London. She holds a Ph.D. in sociology from City, University of London. Her work has won awards by the Florida Society of News Editors and the Society for Profesional Journalists.