Divided Cyprus limits crossings over coronavirus

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Cyprus on Friday announced the temporary closure of half of the crossing points across the divided island's ceasefire line in an effort to prevent a coronavirus outbreak.

Four of the eight checkpoints will be shut for seven days "for more effective control over the entry points," said health minister Constantinos Ioannou.

The closures, which include a busy pedestrian crossing in the heart of the capital Nicosia, will take effect on Saturday, he told reporters.

The Mediterranean island is divided between the Republic of Cyprus—a European Union member state—and the breakaway Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, recognised only by Ankara.

Turkey has had troops stationed in the country since 1974 when it invaded and occupied its northern third after a coup sponsored by the military junta then ruling Greece.

It is believed to be the first time that several of the crossings have been closed since they were first opened in 2003.

Cyprus has not reported any cases of novel coronavirus, which has killed more than 2,800 people worldwide, mostly in China where the epidemic started in late December.

Ioannou said the closures were to protect "both communities", and the decision was made following a cabinet meeting to discuss coronavirus.

Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades has informed Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci of the decision.

Other crossings will remain open, including the busy Ayios Dometios checkpoint in the divided capital Nicosia, which is open to vehicle traffic.

Medical checks at that crossing will be increased, Ioannou said.

The United Nations, whose peacekeepers patrol the 180-kilometre (112-mile) ceasefire line, and British authorities, who maintain two military bases on Cyprus, have been informed, Ioannou said.

Anastasiades has offered his summer residence to quarantine those who have visited infected countries but show no symptoms, health officials said on Thursday.

Government buildings in the Troodos mountains will also be used to quarantine people who may be infected with the novel coronavirus.

People travelling from countries designated as high risk—including China, South Korea, Italy, Japan and Iran—will be assessed upon arrival, officials said.

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