

European nations step up coronavirus measures

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As Italy sees a surge in new coronavirus infections, other countries in Europe and European institutions have stepped up measures to combat the spread.

These measures often extend steps already in place since the outbreak first started in China.

Quarantining travellers

The European Commission has advised its staff who have travelled through the red zone of 11 northern Italian villages subject to Italian quarantine to self-isolate for 14 days or until notified.

At the moment it is not recommending the reintroduction of border controls in the Schengen area.

The European Parliament has issued a similar two-week self-isolation order for its staff, though for a larger Italian region comprising Lombardy, Piedmont, Emilia-Romagna and Veneto, as well as China including Hong Kong and Macau, Singapore and South Korea.

The Romanian government has said that all those coming from Italy's affected regions, China or from the ship Diamond Princess will be held in quarantine for 14 days.

In France, citizens returning from Italian regions hit by the coronavirus outbreak have been instructed to avoid "all non-essential outings" for two weeks after their return and keep their children home from school.

Britain has requested travellers returning from affected areas in northern Italy, China, South Korea and Iran to isolate themselves and inform the authorities.

Six schools were closed in the UK while others asked pupils or staff members who had visited northern Italy to remain at home.

Bosnia has also advised those who have travelled to affected countries to see a doctor and stay at home.

The mayor of Hungarian town Eger closed the city's swimming pool and

ordered it disinfected after its water-polo team trained in it following their return from a match in Italy.

Travel disruption

Countries including Austria, Britain, Hungary, Luxembourg, Romania, Spain and Ukraine have warned their citizens not to travel to the affected areas in Italy.

Finland is urging citizens to exercise "extreme caution" when in Italy and notify consular services of their travel plans, while Denmark too recommends travellers should be cautious.

Bulgaria Air has cancelled all flights between Sofia and Milan until March 27.

Austria said there could be further limited border closures following the temporary halt of railway traffic at the Brenner pass on Sunday.

Austria's Carinthia state, on the border with Italy, postponed a cross-country skiing competition where 300 participants from northern Italy were expected.

And French train conductors on national rail operator SNCF's Paris-Milan line are being replaced by their Italian counterparts when they reach the border.

Croatia has cancelled all school trips for the coming 30 days.

Screenings, onboard precautions

Several countries have extended airport screenings for passengers with fever symptoms arriving from Italy.

Such screenings are done in Budapest and Debrecen, Hungary's second-largest city, as well as airports in the Ukrainian capital Kiev and on buses at Ukraine's land border with Hungary.

Meanwhile, Ukraine International Airlines onboard personnel will wear rubber gloves and masks on flights from Italy.

Czech capital Prague's airport has also earmarked special gates with targeted screening and "increased hygienic measures".

In Poland's capital Warsaw, medical personnel are boarding planes from Italy for temperature checks before allowing passengers to disembark.

In Croatia, people returning from the virus-hit Italian regions will be questioned by border police, epidemiologists and sanitary inspectors.

And Serbia said it would introduce interviews and medical checks for passengers coming from "areas with a high transmission rate of the virus" in the past two weeks.

Other measures

Sweden's health agency said it would not waste resources on "ineffective" airport controls, as infected people may not show symptoms.

But the country has earmarked 40 million kronor (\$4.1 million) for the World Health Organization (WHO) to help countries cope with the spread of the virus.

Denmark has set aside 8 million kroner (\$1.2 million) for the WHO crisis fund.

US petrol giant Chevron has urged employees at its Canary Wharf office in London to work from home to cut the risk of exposure.

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