

# Fourth person from quarantined ship dies as Japan plans new measures

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A fourth person died Tuesday in Japan after becoming ill aboard a cruise ship stricken by the new coronavirus, a government official said, as authorities unveiled new measures that aimed to fight the outbreak.

Nearly 700 people on board the Diamond Princess, which has been quarantined for more than three weeks off Japan, have so far tested positive for the virus.

Four people who were hospitalised after being taken off the ship have died, the latest a Japanese male passenger in his 80s, a health ministry official said.

The Tokyo resident tested positive for the new coronavirus and died of pneumonia, the ministry official said.

Three others, all Japanese, have so far died after becoming sick on the ship. Two were confirmed to have the new coronavirus, while the health ministry declined to comment on the diagnosis of the third.

Japan has come under increasing pressure over its handling of the vessel, particularly after it emerged that some passengers allowed to disembark after testing negative were subsequently diagnosed with the virus.

Some of the disembarking passengers were not even tested during their quarantine period, the health ministry has acknowledged.

A female passenger in her 60s who tested negative on board the ship and returned to her house in Tokushima, western Japan, later tested positive, a local government official said late Tuesday.

The woman did not have symptoms but voluntarily took another virus test after returning home and will be hospitalised on Wednesday.

Several government officials working on the ship have themselves contracted the infection, but authorities have defended a policy of not uniformly testing those working on the vessel.

"We are aware of the risks of them getting infected when they take off a mask or gloves, so we will have thorough measures to prevent infections under these circumstances," Health Minister Katsunobu Kato said, while stressing no change in policy was planned.

Many nations have evacuated their citizens from the ship.

About 450 Filipinos flew home late Tuesday on two chartered flights from Tokyo's Haneda airport, public broadcaster NHK said, adding that 60 other Filipinos who tested positive have been hospitalised in Japan.

About 140 Indians are also set for repatriation if cleared of infection.

## **'Contain the spread'**

As the situation on the ship has come under scrutiny, infections have spiked inside Japan, with at least 164 cases including one death, the health ministry said late Tuesday.

"We are seeing in several areas in our country the sporadic emergence of patients whose routes of infection remain unclear and there are some clusters of patients," Kato said.

"Now is a truly important time in order to control infection in Japan."

The government unveiled Tuesday various measures intended to slow the spread of the virus, including expanding the number of hospitals that can receive suspected patients and asking people with moderate symptoms to stay at home.

The health minister has already urged people to avoid crowds and unnecessary gatherings. The government is also calling for businesses to encourage teleworking and off-peak commuting.

"We need assistance from businesses and organisations to let people stay away from offices, to avoid rush-hour commuting hours," Kato said.

Experts are being dispatched to Hokkaido, where the governor has warned he fears a cluster of infections.

On Tuesday, the J-League postponed all football matches until mid-March over the novel coronavirus outbreak, which has affected dozens of sports events worldwide.

But the government has brushed aside worries about the Olympics, which Tokyo hosts this summer.

"We are talking about the situation now," Kato said when asked about the Games.

The Olympics "is taking place in July, so we are not talking about that situation... we are talking about the government's position now".

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