

UAE limits flights to Iran from Dubai over virus outbreak

February 25 2020, by Jon Gambrell



A policeman and pedestrians wear masks to help guard against the Coronavirus, in downtown Tehran, Iran, Sunday, Feb. 23, 2020. On Sunday, Iran's health ministry raised the death toll from the new virus to 8 people in the country, amid concerns that clusters there, as well as in Italy and South Korea, could signal a serious new stage in its global spread. (AP Photo/Ebrahim Noroozi)

Dubai International Airport, the world's busiest for international travel, said Tuesday that the United Arab Emirates is limiting flights to Iran over the outbreak of the new coronavirus, just a day after it spread across multiple Mideast nations from the Islamic Republic.

The UAE, home to long-haul carriers Emirates and Etihad, remains a key international transit route for Iran's 80 million people. While Dubai International Airport said flights to Tehran would continue under close watch, it shows the growing concern over the spread of the virus in Iran amid worries the outbreak may be larger than what authorities there now acknowledge.

Emirati officials declined to comment or confirm the airport's announcement. There was no immediate acknowledgement from Iran of the decision as well.

In a statement to The Associated Press, Dubai International Airport said it would follow an order issued by the country's General Civil Aviation Authority.

"All flights to and from the Islamic Republic of Iran, with the exception of Tehran, have been suspended until further notice," the airport said. "All passengers arriving on direct flights from Tehran will receive thermal screening at the airport by (the) Dubai Health Authority and its airport medical center team."

Emirates, the government-owned carrier based in Dubai, flies daily to Tehran. It did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Its low-cost sister airline, FlyDubai, said its flights to Isfahan, Lar, Mashhad and Shiraz had been cancelled. FlyDubai will continue its twice-weekly flights to Tehran.



Pedestrians wear masks to help guard against the Coronavirus, in downtown Tehran, Iran, Sunday, Feb. 23, 2020. On Sunday Iran's health ministry raised the death toll from the new virus to 8 people in the country, amid concerns that clusters there, as well as in Italy and South Korea, could signal a serious new stage in its global spread. (AP Photo/Ebrahim Noroozi)

Sharjah-based low-cost carrier Air Arabia, which also flies to multiple Iranian cities, did not respond to a request for comment.

The airport's announcement came after Bahrain said it would suspend all flights from Dubai and Sharjah, a neighboring UAE emirate that is home to Air Arabia, for 48 hours. Officials at Sharjah's airport could not be immediately reached.

Bahrain's Health Ministry on Tuesday raised the number of infected cases from the new virus to eight, saying that all had traveled from Iran via Dubai. Four of them have been identified as Saudi nationals. The cases were confirmed upon arrival to Bahrain during screenings at the airport, and prior to the suspension on flights to Dubai and Sharjah, according to Bahrain's official news agency.

Dubai has been screening passengers on incoming flights from China, where the outbreak began in December. Long-haul carriers Emirates and Etihad are among the few international airlines still flying to Beijing. However, the outbreak in Iran only became public in recent days.

The novel coronavirus has infected more than 80,000 people globally, causing around 2,700 deaths, mainly in China. The World Health Organization has named the illness COVID-19, referring to its origin late last year and the coronavirus that causes it.



A public bus driver, right, and a pedestrian wear masks to help guard against the Coronavirus in downtown Tehran, Iran, Sunday, Feb. 23, 2020. On Sunday Iran's health ministry raised the death toll from the new virus to 8 people in the country, amid concerns that clusters there, as well as in Italy and South Korea, could signal a serious new stage in its global spread. (AP Photo/Ebrahim Noroozi)

Iran's government said Monday that 12 people had died nationwide from the new coronavirus, rejecting claims of a much higher death toll of 50 by a lawmaker from the city of Qom that has been at the epicenter of the virus in the country. The conflicting reports raised questions about the Iranian government's transparency concerning the scale of the outbreak.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani sought to reassure the nation in a

speech on Tuesday, calling the new coronavirus an "uninvited and inauspicious passenger."

"We will get through corona," Rouhani said. "We will get through the virus."

Afghanistan, Kuwait, Iraq and Oman also announced their first cases of the virus on Monday and connected them to travel with Iran.

The UAE, a federation of seven sheikhdoms on the Arabian Peninsula, has reported 13 cases of the new virus. Most of those were connected to Chinese travel.



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Meanwhile, Kuwait raised the number of its infected cases from three to five people. All five were passengers returning on a flight from the Iranian city of Mashhad, where Iran's government has not yet announced a single case of the virus.

The state-run Kuwait News Agency reported the two latest cases on Monday evening in two women whose nationalities were not disclosed. Kuwait had halted over the weekend transport links with Iran and was evacuating its citizens from Iran.

Also, Oman, which has good ties with Iran, has halted flights with its Persian Gulf neighbor. Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are the only two Gulf countries that still have direct flights to Iran.

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