

UK calls virus "serious" health threat; will detain people

February 10 2020, by Danica Kirka



Coaches carrying people who have recently flown back from China arrive at Kents Hill Park Training and Conference Centre, in Milton Keynes, England, Sunday Feb. 9, 2020. Britain's evacuation plane, the second one chartered by the government, arrived Sunday morning at RAF Brize Norton. British officials said the flight brought back 105 British citizens and family members, as well as 95 European citizens and family members. They will be quarantined for 14 days. (Aaron Chown/PA via AP)

Britain has declared the new coronavirus that emerged from China a "serious and imminent threat to public health" and announced new measures Monday to combat the spread of the disease.

The U.K. Department of Health and Social Care said people with the virus can now be forcibly quarantined and will not be free to leave. It named two British specialist hospitals in London as isolation facilities for those affected: Guy's and St. Thomas' and The Royal Free. It also designated the Chinese city of Wuhan and the surrounding Hubei province where the virus first emerged as a "infected area."

It said the number of virus cases in Britain has doubled to eight, with the four new cases reported Monday all known contacts of an earlier U.K. case, a person who was infected in France. Experts at Public Health England were working hard to trace people who have come into contact with confirmed cases.

"The incidence or transmission of novel coronavirus constitutes a serious and imminent threat to public health, and the measures outlined in these regulations are considered as an effective means of delaying or preventing further transmission of the virus," the agency said.

It added the changes were designed to ensure the health and safety of both patients and medical workers. Britain has only eight of Europe's 43 confirmed virus cases but it is a key travel hub between Asia and Europe.



A soldier wearing protective mask drives a military bus with Italians evacuated from Wuhan, China, as it arrives at an army complex in Rome, Sunday, Feb. 9, 2020. The Italian foreign ministry said the eight Italians who were first flown to Britain aboard the Royal Air Force plane have arrived in Italy Sunday afternoon via an Italian air force flight. Aboard the same flight to Italy were also seven Danes, three Swedes and two Greeks. The eight Italians were transferred to an Italian military hospital in Rome for quarantine. (AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia)

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's spokesman described the announcement as a measure to strengthen regulations and said it does not mean the threat to the public has increased.

"The U.K. threat level as set by Public Health England and the chief medical officer remains unchanged at moderate," said spokesman James Slack.

The change comes after a British man who caught the virus at a business conference in Singapore in January appears to be linked to at least seven other confirmed cases in Europe.

Five British citizens, including a 9-year-old boy, contracted the virus in the French Alpine ski town of Contamines-Montjoie after staying in the same chalet as the British man. French medical authorities tested scores of children and their families Sunday from the area for the new virus and temporarily closed three nearby schools.



Medics personnel wear protective overall as Italians evacuated from Wuhan, China, on a military bus arrive at an army complex in Rome, Sunday, Feb. 9, 2020. The Italian foreign ministry said the eight Italians who were first flown to Britain aboard the Royal Air Force plane have arrived in Italy Sunday afternoon via an Italian air force flight. Aboard the same flight to Italy were also seven Danes, three Swedes and two Greeks. The eight Italians were transferred to an Italian military hospital in Rome for quarantine. (AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia)



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People wearing face masks disembark from an aircraft repatriating British and other nationalities to the UK from the coronavirus hit city of Wuhan in China, following its arrival at RAF Brize Norton, England, Sunday Feb. 9, 2020. (Jacob King/PA via AP)



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Kents Hill Park Training and Conference Centre, in Milton Keynes, England, Sunday Feb. 9, 2020, ahead of the repatriation to the UK of the latest Coronavirus evacuees who have landed at RAF Brize Norton. (Aaron Chown/PA via AP)

China on Monday said 908 people had died of the virus on the mainland and over 40,170 had been infected. More than 360 cases have been confirmed outside mainland China, including two deaths in Hong Kong and the Philippines.

In Brussels, the European Union commissioner for crisis management said Monday that the new virus will be discussed Thursday at an emergency meeting of health ministers from the 27-member bloc. Janez Lenarcic said the new virus is spreading with great speed and poses a

"serious danger for public health."

Over 500 EU citizens have been repatriated from China in the last few weeks to avoid being infected.

Ukraine, which has no virus cases, said two Ukrainians working as crew members on the Diamond Princess cruise ship that is quarantined in Japan have come down with the virus. They have been transferred to a Tokyo hospital and will be in quarantine for 14 days.

The Danish Sea-Intelligence analyst company, meanwhile, says the world's shipping container business is losing about 2.4 billion kroner (\$351.5 million) a week because of the virus, mainly because of a drop in transported containers in and out of China, according to industry site Maritime Danmark. Sea-Intelligence reports the drop is about 350,000 containers per week.

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