

Airline hub UAE tells residents not to travel over virus

March 5 2020



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The United Arab Emirates on Thursday warned its citizens and its foreign residents not to travel anywhere abroad amid the ongoing worldwide coronavirus outbreak, a stark warning for a country home to two major long-haul airlines.

The country's Health and Community Protection Ministry warning comes as its capital, Abu Dhabi, sent 215 foreigners it evacuated from hard-hit Hubei in China to a quarantine set up in its Emirates Humanitarian City. They include citizens of Egypt, Sudan and Yemen.

Health officials warned that those traveling abroad could face quarantine themselves at the discretion of authorities. The UAE is home to some 9 million people, with only about 1 million estimated to be Emirati citizens.

The UAE is home to Emirates, the government-owned airline based at Dubai International Airport, the world's busiest for international travel. Abu Dhabi also is home to Etihad, the country's national carrier. Both airlines have encouraged staff to take time off as international travel has dropped due to the virus.

There are now over 3,150 cases of the virus across the Mideast. Of those outside Iran in the region, most link back to the Islamic Republic. There, authorities say the virus has killed at least 92 people amid 2,922 confirmed cases. Iran and Italy have the world's highest death tolls outside of China.

The coronavirus outbreak has disrupted Islamic worship in the Middle East, as Saudi Arabia on Wednesday banned its citizens and other residents of the kingdom from performing the pilgrimage in Mecca, while Iran canceled Friday prayers in major cities.



Workers sterilize the ground in front of the Kaaba, the cubic building at the Grand Mosque, in the Muslim holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia, Thursday, March 5, 2020. Saudi Arabia's Deputy Health Minister Abdel-Fattah Mashat was quoted on the state-linked news site Al-Yaum saying that groups of visitors to Mecca from inside the country would now also be barred from performing the pilgrimage, known as the umrah. (AP Photo/Amr Nabil)



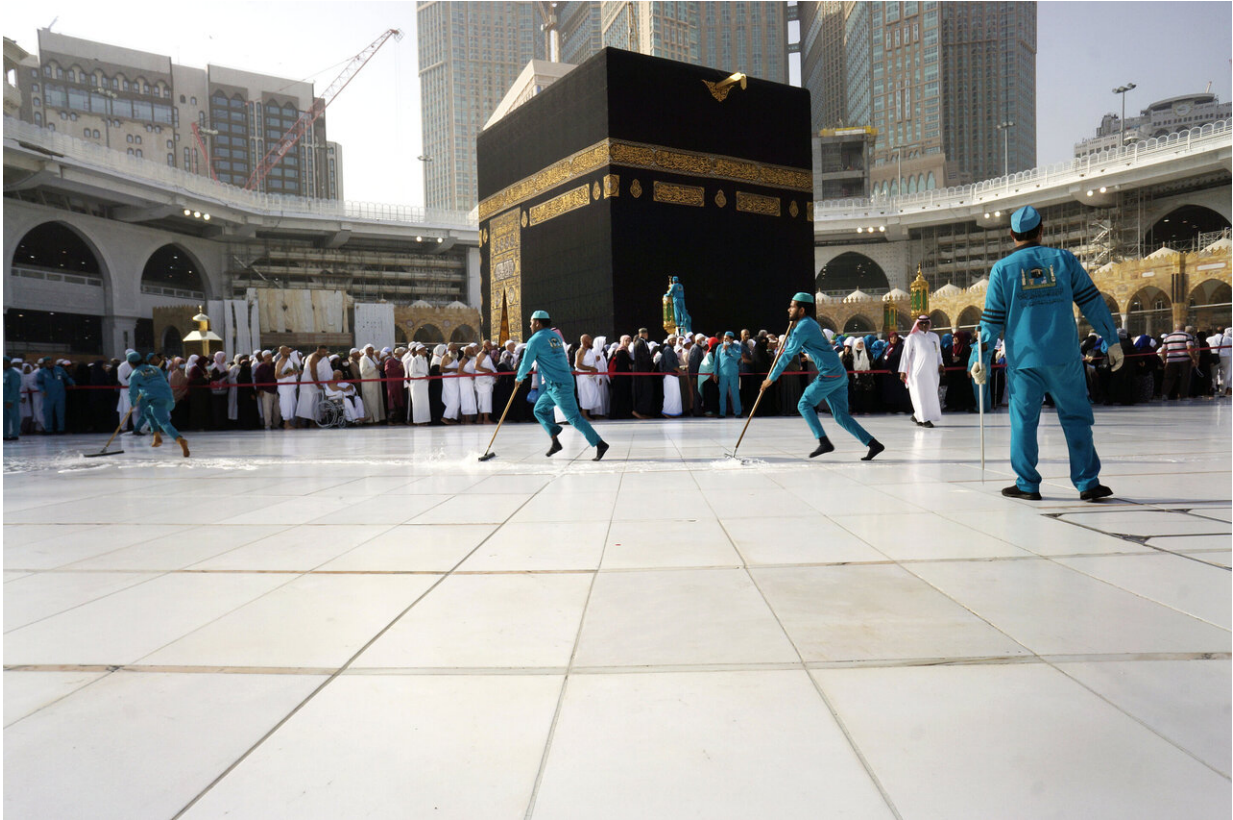
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A Muslim pilgrim wears a mask as he visits the Grand Mosque, in the Muslim holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia, Thursday, March 5, 2020. Saudi Arabia's Deputy Health Minister Abdel-Fattah Mashat was quoted on the state-linked news site Al-Yaum saying that groups of visitors to Mecca from inside the country would now also be barred from performing the pilgrimage, known as the umrah. (AP Photo/Amr Nabil)



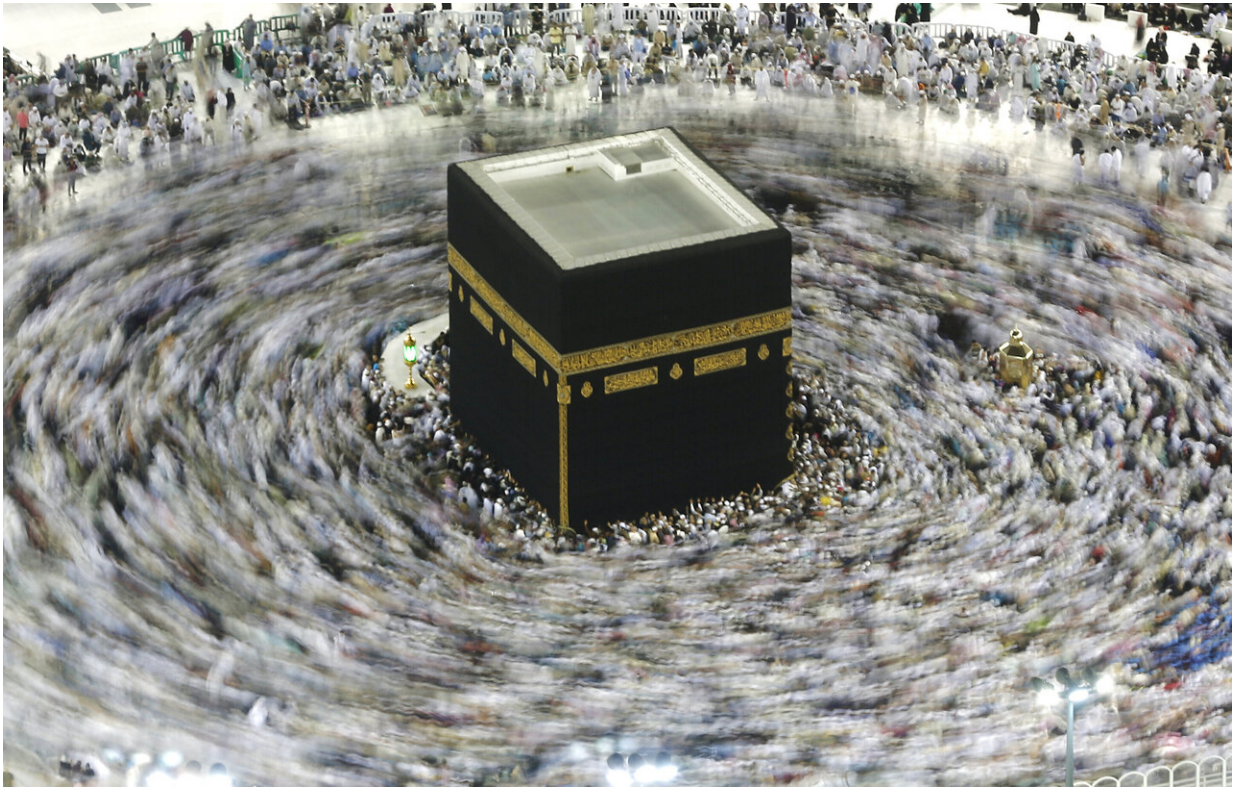
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Indonesian pilgrims, who entered Mecca before halting the visas, wait their bus to leave home in the Muslim holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia, Thursday, March 5, 2020. Saudi Arabia's Deputy Health Minister Abdel-Fattah Mashat was quoted on the state-linked news site Al-Yaum saying that groups of visitors to Mecca from inside the country would now also be barred from performing the pilgrimage, known as the umrah. (AP Photo/Amr Nabil)



In this April 20, 2017 file photo, Emirates planes are parked at the Dubai International Airport in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Major disruptions due to the new coronavirus have already caused the equivalent of a roughly \$100 million loss to airline carriers in the Middle East region, which serves as a connection hub for east-west travel, the industry's main trade association said on Monday, March 2, 2020. (AP Photo/Kamran Jebreili, File)



In this picture taken with a slow shutter speed, far smaller crowds than usual of Muslim pilgrims circumambulate the Kaaba, the cubic building at the Grand Mosque, in the Muslim holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. The coronavirus outbreak disrupted Islamic worship in the Middle East as Saudi Arabia on Wednesday banned its citizens and other residents of the kingdom from performing the pilgrimage in Mecca, while Iran canceled Friday prayers in major cities. (AP Photo/Amr Nabil)



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A woman wearing a face mask and gloves crosses an intersection in northern Tehran, Iran, Wednesday, March 4, 2020. With deaths spiking in Iran and Italy and infections spreading quickly through Europe, the Mideast and the Americas, countries were considering new drastic measures to curb the new coronavirus that first emerged in China. (AP Photo/Vahid Salemi)

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Citation: Airline hub UAE tells residents not to travel over virus (2020, March 5) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-03-airline-hub-uae-residents-virus.html>

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