

# Bulgaria closes schools amid nationwide flu epidemic

March 6 2020

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Bulgaria declared a nationwide influenza epidemic, closing schools and banning planned surgeries from Friday as the country—so far spared any novel coronavirus infections—grapples with a rise in flu cases.

Members of the national task force set up to address the new coronavirus warned hospitals were already full of [flu patients](#), potentially jeopardising preparedness to respond to an expected virus arrival and spread.

Doctors in the EU's poorest member say the country of 7 million people has seen an unusual rapid spread of type B flu.

"Such rapid growth of type B flu has not happened in Bulgaria for the past ten years," said Todor Kantardzhiev, director of the national centre for [contagious diseases](#).

Almost 5,000 people contracted type B flu in the last week of February, according to National Centre of Infectious and Parasitic Diseases data with babies and children aged under 14 most affected.

Schools will remain closed until March 11, the health ministry said, recommending universities cancel classes in order to contain the outbreak.

Local authorities were also advised to cancel sports or cultural events likely to draw large numbers of people.

Hospitals were meanwhile ordered to postpone all planned surgeries and ban patients' visits.

Pharmacies in the Balkan country have already run out of protective face masks and disinfectants as people rushed to stock themselves amid a coronavirus panic.

"The health system is already overburdened even before a first case of coronavirus has been detected," said [health ministry](#) official Angel Kunchev.

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