

First three deaths from new coronavirus in Belgium (Update)

March 11 2020



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Belgium has recorded its first three deaths from the coronavirus strain that is sweeping the globe, and four staff at the European Commission have taken sick, officials said Wednesday.

The health ministry said the first fatalities were a 73-year-old man and a 90-year-old woman who had been in Brussels hospitals and and 86-year-old man from a care home in the district of Sint-Genesius-Rode, south of the capital.

"Our hospitals are seeing more and more people with lower respiratory tract infections. This may indicate the beginning of a real epidemic in our country," the ministry warned.

"We must protect our citizens who are unhealthy, chronically ill or elderly," it said.

Several care homes have banned visitors, and Belgian authorities have advised mayors to ban gatherings of more than 1,000 people.

As of Wednesday, Belgium had confirmed 314 cases of the coronavirus strain that causes COVID-19, up from 267 the day before, according to the health ministry.

China remains the hardest-hit country overall. But the virus is spreading rapidly in Europe, especially in Italy.

Belgium's first death was in Brussels, which in addition to being the Belgian capital is home to the headquarters of the European Union and the NATO military alliance.

On Wednesday, staff at the European Commission's Brussels headquarters received a mail telling them that four of their colleagues had tested positive for the new coronavirus and three more were being tested.

This follows at least four positive tests in other EU institutions, and one each at NATO's headquarters in Brussels and its military command in

Mons, in southern Belgium.

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