Cyprus main hospital shuts after surgeon diagnosed with coronavirus

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Cyprus on Tuesday temporarily closed the country's largest hospital after its chief heart surgeon was among three cases of novel coronavirus confirmed on the divided eastern Mediterranean island.

The Republic of Cyprus had on Monday reported its first two cases of the disease—meaning that all 27 European Union member states have

now been hit by the virus.

And on Tuesday, the Turkish-controlled north of the island announced the first case there, a 65-year-old German woman.

Cyprus is divided between areas under the full control of EU member state the Republic of Cyprus and the northern third controlled by the breakaway Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which is recognised only by Ankara.

Even before the first confirmed cases, fear over a spread of coronavirus had caused frictions between the two sides and sparked angry protests after Cypriot authorities closed four of the eight checkpoints on the line dividing the island.

On Tuesday Republic of Cyprus health ministry said it had put on lockdown Nicosia General Hospital for at least 48 hours to carry out a "deep clean" after its head of heart surgery tested positive for coronavirus following a trip to Britain.

"All scheduled appointments, admissions and all types of surgery are cancelled for the next 48 hours, during which time the situation will be re-evaluated," the hospital said in a statement. "Disinfection of the premises used by the confirmed incident has already begun."

People who came into contact with the doctor were told to self-isolate, and those who travelled to countries affected by the virus in the past 14 days told to stay home.

Tensions

Health Minister Constantinos Ioannou told private radio station Politis that 152 samples had been sent for testing from patients and staff at the

Nicosia hospital who came into contact with the Cypriot doctor.

The other case is of a 25-year-old Cypriot man who had recently returned from a trip to Milan, Italy, officials have said.

Cyprus also stepped up containment measures Tuesday that had previously covered arrivals from Hubei province in China, Italy, Iran and South Korea.

It asked people to self-isolate at home for 14 days if they have recently been to other areas of China, Japan, Hong Kong, Germany, France, Spain, Greece and Britain.

The tourist who tested positive for coronavirus in the breakaway Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus on Tuesday had arrived on the island from Balingen in Germany on Sunday, authorities said.

She was among a 30-member tourist group that was staying at a hotel in the coastal city of Famagusta, TRNC health minister Ali Pilli told reporters.

The woman was taken to a hospital in Nicosia after complaining of high fever and put under quarantine while the hotel was in lockdown, he added.

On February 29, Cypriot authorities closed the four checkpoints on the line dividing the island "for more effective control over the entry points", initially for a seven-day period that was expected to be extended.

Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci has criticised the closures, calling the move "unnecessary" and politically-motivated, while Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades insists the decision was taken "based on

scientific data".

The United Nations voiced concern over "disruption" caused by the temporary closure of the crossings, urging both sides to cooperate.

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