

# Czechs close borders from March 16 over virus spread

March 13 2020



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The Czech government said Friday it would ban all foreign travellers from entering and all Czechs from leaving the country as of March 16 in a bid to stem the coronavirus spread.

"As of midnight Sunday-Monday, we ban all foreigners from entering the Czech Republic and, at the same time, all Czech citizens from leaving the Czech territory," Interior Minister Jan Hamacek told reporters.

"It's a very tough measure but we think it may fundamentally contribute to stemming the spread of the coronavirus."

The measure does not concern foreigners with permanent residence or a residency permit for over 90 days in the EU member state, which has 117 confirmed cases of the virus and no deaths.

The government also ordered a mandatory two-week quarantine for people coming to the Czech Republic from 15 "risk countries" as of Friday at noon, with the exception of transit travellers.

These countries include China, South Korea, Iran, Italy, Spain, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Great Britain, Denmark and France.

The government has also designated the act of spreading coronavirus as a crime, Prime Minister Andrej Babis said.

On Thursday, the Czech government declared a 30-day state of emergency.

It has also closed schools across the country, as well as theatres, cinemas, galleries and museums and banned gatherings of more than 30 people with the exception of funerals.

Restaurants will be forced to shutter from 1900 GMT to 0500 GMT and all gyms, swimming pools, clubs and libraries will also be closed to the public.

On Friday, the government also banned prison visits.

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Citation: Czechs close borders from March 16 over virus spread (2020, March 13) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-03-czechs-foreign.html>

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