

Iceland to do general screening for coronavirus

March 10 2020

Iceland will screen its population, including random samples, for the new coronavirus to determine how widely it has spread, a company involved in the plan said Tuesday.

Since February 28, a total of 76 cases have been confirmed on the small North Atlantic island, but no one has died.

Last week, the Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management nonetheless raised the alert level to "emergency phase" after two instances of transmission inside the country were confirmed.

On Tuesday the government also announced a plan "to respond to the economic impact of COVID-19," the disease caused by the virus.

Meanwhile, Decode genetics, a human genome research specialist, is to test thousands of Icelanders, including those not showing symptoms.

"The lower limit for people screened will be about 5,000," chief executive Kari Stefansson told AFP.

That amounts to about 1.4 percent of the subarctic nation's entire population of around 357,000 people and Stefansson said screenings would begin by the end of the week.

Depending on the results, even more expansive testing could be pursued in the future.

Widespread screening, as opposed to just testing people who show symptoms, is meant to help authorities decide on the need for a quarantine or a ban on [mass gatherings](#).

Decode genetics offered to help the government, which has been relying on the National University Hospital of Iceland to analyse samples.

The hospital can only operate at a considerably smaller scale however.

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