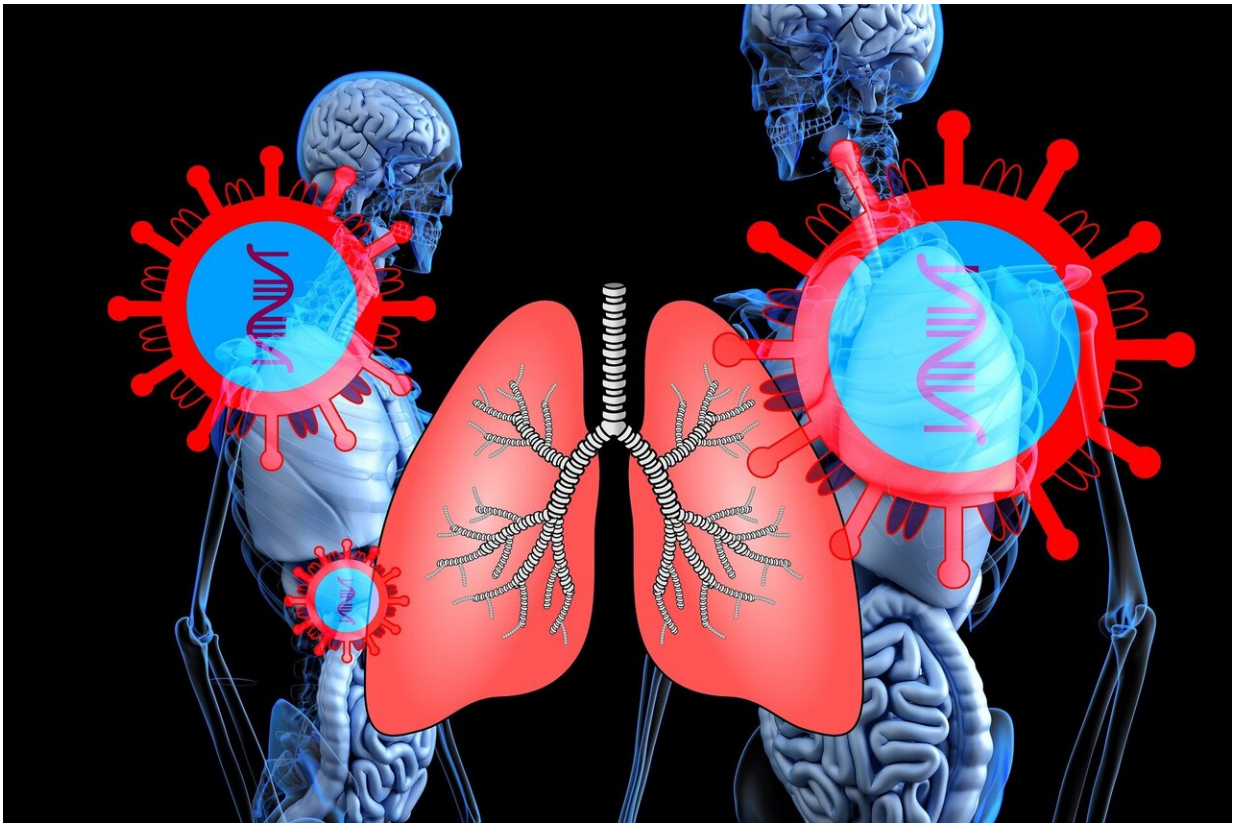


Iran says 15 new coronavirus deaths raise toll to 107

March 5 2020



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Iran on Thursday reported 15 new deaths from the novel coronavirus, raising the national toll to 107, and said it would keep schools and universities closed until early April.

Major cultural and sporting events have already been suspended and working hours reduced across the country, which is one of the worst hit after China.

"Schools and universities will be closed until the end" of the current Iranian year, health minister Saeed Namaki said in a televised press conference.

The Iranian year ends on March 19 and national holidays than last until early April.

"People should not consider this as an opportunity to go travelling," the minister said. "They should stay home and take our warnings seriously.

"This virus is highly contagious. It is a serious matter, do not joke about it."

The Islamic republic also reported 591 additional confirmed cases from the COVID-19 illness, bringing the total to 3,513 infected.

"Until today, samples have been taken of 23,327 suspected cases, only 3,513 of which have been confirmed," said ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour.

According to Jahanpour, Tehran province is the worst-hit with 1,352 confirmed cases, followed by Qom with 386, Gilan with 333 and Esfahan with 238.

The Shiite holy city of Qom, south of Tehran, is the epicentre of Iran's [coronavirus](#) outbreak and where its first deaths were reported on February 19.

Authorities have since scrambled to halt its rapid spread.

"But there is some good news, of the increasing rate of recovery," Jahanpour said, noting that 739 of the [confirmed cases](#) had made recoveries.

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