

Iran says 149 new coronavirus deaths, toll reaches 1,284

March 19 2020



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Iranian authorities on Thursday announced 149 new deaths from the novel coronavirus, raising the toll to 1,284 in a country that is one of the worst hit by the pandemic.

While Thursday's death toll surpassed that of the previous day's—147 were reported on Wednesday—the number of new cases has fallen, according to figures provided by Deputy Health Minister Alireza Raisi.

A total of 18,407 people have contracted the disease in Iran, with 1,046 new cases confirmed in the last 24 hours.

"In 11 provinces" out of 31, "the number of infections has decreased because people have followed our guidelines", Raisi said, renewing the call for Iranians to stay home.

Tehran province had the highest number of new cases, with 137 reported, followed by the central province of Isfahan, with 108 and Gilan in the north with 73.

Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour tweeted that at the current rate, "50 new cases of infection are detected every hour and one death recorded every 10 minutes".

"Considering this information, make a conscious decision concerning travel, days out and family visits during Nowruz", the Persian New Year holiday, he said.

The Nowruz celebrations, which last from Friday until April 3, often see Iranians travel to visit family.

For several weeks, Iranian authorities, who have so far refused to impose confinement or quarantine measures, have asked the population to refrain from travelling and to take the virus "seriously".

Several provinces have ordered the closure of hotels.

In a rare move, Iran announced on Monday the shuttering of four

important Shiite holy sites in an effort to stem the spread of the epidemic.

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