

Israel imposes near-lockdown to contain virus

March 17 2020

Israel on Tuesday barred residents from leaving home for "non-essential" reasons and stopped night-time public transport, tightening already strict measures to fight the spread of coronavirus.

A health ministry directive ordered people to stay at home unless going out to buy food or medicine, seeking [medical attention](#), or travelling to workplaces where no more than 10 people are present.

"You must not leave your homes to visit parks, playgrounds, the beach, the pool or libraries," a ministry statement said.

"You should maintain [social contacts](#) by media and not entertain friends or family unless they live in your building."

The statement did not say when the [new regulations](#) come into force and AFP could not immediately reach a health ministry spokesman.

Israel, which has already vastly restricted international travel and closed all sporting and entertainment venues, has confirmed 304 COVID-19 cases so far.

It has reported no deaths from the illness yet.

The country's internal security agency Shin Bet said earlier on Tuesday it had been authorised to collect information about citizens to fight the spread of the disease.

The measure was approved by the cabinet overnight using emergency regulations, which do not require parliamentary approval.

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