

Israel severely restricts entry from Europe due to virus

March 4 2020

Israel on Wednesday imposed tough new travel restrictions on five European nations due to fears of coronavirus, barring entry to almost all non-residents of the Jewish state arriving from these affected countries.

Israel had earlier in the day ordered all citizens and residents returning from the five countries—France, Germany, Spain, Austria and Switzerland—into 14-day home quarantine upon entering the country.

The measures come on top of restrictions previously imposed on arrivals from mainland China, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, Macau, South Korea, Japan and Italy.

Guidelines issued by the health ministry on Wednesday afternoon declared that foreigners from the affected European countries "will not be able to enter Israeli territory unless they can prove they have a place to stay in quarantine".

The interior ministry issued a statement in the evening saying tourists from these countries "will not be able to enter Israel from Friday at 8:00 am (0600 GMT)".

"Those who arrive before this date will not be turned back," the statement added.

The ministry added that the restrictions did not apply to people who merely transitted through airports in one of the listed countries.

"We are at the peak of a global epidemic," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said during his announcement of the latest travel restrictions.

"We are in a better situation than other countries because, since the beginning, I have given instructions to the maximum possible, not the minimum" level of precaution.

"And we have taken strict, very strict measures, to slow the spread of the virus," Netanyahu added.

Israel currently has 15 confirmed cases of the virus but no deaths, with some 7,000 others already in home-quarantine.

In elections on Monday, thousands of people under quarantine voted at special polling stations staffed by officials in full protective gear.

The health ministry on Wednesday ordered a ban on public gatherings of more than 5,000 people.

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