

Kazakhstan locks down two biggest cities due to virus

March 19 2020

Kazakhstan's two main cities of Almaty and Nur-Sultan went into lockdown on Thursday to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

The army and police blocked roads leading into Almaty—the oil-rich Central Asian country's usually bustling business hub—using armoured vehicles, barriers and concrete blocks.

Troops and police manned checkpoints as medics checked the temperatures of car passengers and recorded their names.

The Kazakh authorities plan to block entry and exit routes to Almaty from Sunday, along with similar restrictions for the capital Nur-Sultan located some 1,000 kilometres (600 miles) further north.

The streets in Almaty were mostly empty on Thursday except for queues of people outside some pharmacies.

"Infection is a really cunning enemy," said Mira Ruziyeva, a vet, who was passing through a road block into the city.

"I for one understand the situation is serious. We all need to show [self-discipline](#) and carry out instructions," she said.

According to the latest official count, Kazakhstan has 44 confirmed cases of [coronavirus](#) infection—19 in Almaty and 25 in Nur-Sultan.

Almaty has 1.8 million residents and Nur-Sultan has around 1 million, according to official figures.

The vast country that borders Russia and China has adopted some of the toughest measures among former Soviet countries and has earlier announced a state of emergency, set to last at least until April 15.

"We ourselves are thinking where this all came from and if this is going to last a long time," said Valentin, a [security guard](#) who was commuting to work in Almaty on Thursday.

"Don't get sick, Almaty," he added, before driving off.

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