

# Latin America steps up measures against coronavirus spread

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Latin American countries stepped up measures to slow the advance of the coronavirus Wednesday, announcing a slew of restrictions on travelers from the worst-affected countries and shutting down major

sports events.

Argentina, Colombia and Peru said travelers from China, Italy, Spain and France would be isolated on arrival.

El Salvador went further, with President Nayib Bukele announcing late Wednesday the Central American country would ban entry to all foreigners for a period of 21 days.

The move would affect "any foreigner who is not a resident or diplomat" posted in the country, Bukele said, adding that Salvadorans arriving from countries hit by the virus would face a 30-day quarantine.

El Salvador—which previously banned entry on to those traveling from the worst-affected countries—is among a handful of states in the region yet to declare a confirmed [coronavirus](#) case.

Argentina was the first Latin American country to register a coronavirus-related death on Saturday, with Panama announcing another on Tuesday.

Cuba registered its first three cases on Wednesday. Three Italian tourists, who had arrived Monday in Havana, all tested positive for the virus and have been quarantined.

The Cuban health ministry said they were "progressing well and none of them is in danger of death."

The continent still has only around 150 registered cases and two deaths.

Though it pales with soaring global figures of 124,000 infections and more than 4,500 deaths, the new measures reflect the region's growing disquiet—particularly given its close links with former colonial power Spain, one of the countries worst hit by the crisis.

Buenos Aires announced a two-week isolation period for people arriving from China, Italy, France, Germany, Spain, Japan, South Korea and the United States.

"If you don't comply, you'll be committing a crime, which is putting the [public health](#) at risk," warned President Alberto Fernandez on Argentine radio.

He said Argentina was considering barring travelers from Italy, the worst-affected European country and one from which many Argentines are descended.

The coronavirus appeared in China in late December and quickly spread through Asia to reach 113 countries and territories by Wednesday.

Latin America remained untouched until the first case appeared in Brazil on February 26.

## **Sports events postponed**

South America's football federations on Wednesday asked FIFA to delay their qualifying matches for the 2022 World Cup due to the pandemic.

Many national side footballers play for clubs in Europe and are likely to be hit by the travel restrictions.

Some top Argentina stars play in Italy, Spain and France, such as Barcelona's Lionel Messi and forwards Paulo Dybala of Juventus and Inter Milan's Lautaro Martinez.

Argentine sports authorities have announced the postponement of several events, including the South American Swimming Championships, an Athletics Grand Prix meeting, the World Cup of Fencing and an

Olympic boxing qualification tournament.

Separately, organizers of April's Argentine Moto GP said it had been postponed until November.

Argentina has registered 19 coronavirus cases and one death, a 64-year-old man who had arrived in Buenos Aires from France.

The Panamanian victim was also 64 and had diabetes.

Panama has suspended school classes until April 7, while Bukele said El Salvador would suspend university classes as well until the end of the month.

Colombia has seen only three cases so far but also announced measures against travelers arriving from affected countries.

"Given the implications of the quarantine by China, Italy, Spain and France, the national government is adopting the preventive isolation of people coming from those countries," President Ivan Duque tweeted.

Peru followed suit by declaring a two-week "home isolation" for people coming from those same four countries, while also announcing the start of the new school year would be pushed back two weeks to March 30.

On Tuesday, Chile was the first Latin American country to announce a quarantine on arrivals from Spain and Italy.

With 23 cases, Chile's total is surpassed regionally only by Brazil's 37.

## **Schools closed**

Bolivia has asked people arriving from affected countries to place

themselves in isolation for two weeks.

Costa Rica has called off large-scale events including football matches, concerts and popular festivals.

Guatemala has banned entry to people from China and migrants from Honduras displaying signs of the virus, while also imposing a week-long hospital stay on those coming from Europe.

Paraguay has suspended school classes and large public events for two weeks, and the Dominican Republic has suspended flights arriving from Milan.

China, where the new coronavirus was first detected, has been the worst affected country with more than 80,000 cases and over 3,100 deaths, although the government says more than 60,000 people have recovered.

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