

Poland bans domestic flights, warns of virus spread

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Poland on Monday suspended all domestic flights as part of sweeping measures to try and halt the spread of the new coronavirus.

The measure comes after the EU country banned entry for foreigners and suspended international flights from Saturday.

Poland has so far registered 150 confirmed cases of the new coronavirus, including three deaths.

The ban on domestic flights came as the health minister warned the country could see a spike in cases of the coronavirus, which is sweeping across Europe.

"We expect to reach 1,000 cases this week," Lukasz Szumowski said, urging Poles to limit their activities outside the home.

The prime minister's office confirmed the domestic flight ban, adding that the measure would be in place until further notice.

City streets across Poland were deserted as citizens worked from home and school universities and most shops were closed.

Only grocery stores, pharmacies and laundry services remained open as Poland imposed unprecedented containment measures, in line with other European nations.

Some 30,000 people have been placed in mandatory 14-day quarantine in Poland, including those who have returned from overseas or who have showed symptoms of COVID-19.

Boy scouts, girl guides and ordinary citizens are helping housebound neighbours by doing their shopping or running essential errands.

In neighbouring Czech Republic, several towns were put under complete lockdown after the country confirmed nearly 300 cases, while in the capital Prague, passengers were banned from public transport unless they

wore face masks.

The Czech Republic has already closed its borders to foreigners and shut restaurants, pubs and cafes.

It said it did not have enough protective gear to cope with an outbreak, and has sent a special military plane to China to collect coronavirus test kits, the defence ministry said Monday.

Elsewhere, as Lithuania prepared to close its borders to foreigners, a massive tailback of vehicles, mostly commercial goods trucks, stretched some 30 kilometres (nearly 20 miles) from a major border crossing with Poland, where border authorities are conducting strenuous health checks.

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