

Swiss soldiers confined to base after virus case

March 3 2020

The Swiss army said Tuesday that all soldiers would be confined to base after a case of the new coronavirus was discovered in their ranks.

A man tested positive for COVID-19 Monday as he was preparing to carry out a required military refresher course, the Swiss armed forces said in a statement.

In Switzerland, which has confirmed 37 cases since the virus first emerged in the country a week ago, the army is organised as a militia, with conscripts carrying out a short initial training and then being called back in for several weeks of training each year.

During the health screening required before the course, the infected man revealed that he had recently returned from Milan in northern Italy, the statement said.

Italy is the European country hardest hit by the outbreak, it said, adding: "He is in stable condition."

The three people in his room were immediately quarantined, as were other conscripts who had come into contact with him.

The army said it had also decided to limit the movement of on-duty troops to ensure they will be ready to respond quickly if needed.

Soldiers can still leave their barracks but have been asked not to do

unless absolutely necessary, army spokesman Daniel Reist told AFP.

In a bid to rein in the spread, Switzerland on Friday suspended all events with more than 1,000 participants until March 15, forcing the cancellation of among others of the Geneva International Motor Show.

In Geneva, which is home to the United Nations and a wide range of international organisations, several cases have surfaced, including one at the European Broadcasting Union (EBU).

"We can confirm that one member of EBU staff tested positive for COVID-19 following their return from northern Italy earlier last week," spokesman David Goodman told AFP, adding that some personnel had been quarantined in their homes as a precaution.

As more countries announce restrictions on events in a bid to tame the virus, he said the EBU was "looking at various possible scenarios" for this year's edition of the hugely popular Eurovision Song Contest, scheduled to be held in the Netherlands in May.

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