

Turkey to step up virus testing as death toll rises

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Turkey hopes to step up coronavirus testing to up to 15,000 people per day, the health minister told the parliament Thursday, while the number of deaths reached four.

"Over 10,000 COVID-19 tests have been completed until today," minister Fahrettin Koca said in an address to parliament.

"We believe the number of tests will increase even more. Our goal is to conduct at least 10-15,000 tests per day."

Koca announced two more deaths from [coronavirus](#), while the number of recorded cases has reached 359, with 168 new cases on Thursday alone.

The latest victim was a 85-year-old woman, he said.

And the other was named as Aytac Yalman, former land forces commander, who died at the age of 80 on March 16.

The minister said the [test](#) for Yalman originally came out negative.

Yalman was also known in connection with the Balyoz (Sledgehammer) coup plot trial in which army officers were accused of plotting to take over the government led by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The president was prime minister when the trial began in 2010.

The case, during which Yalman had provided testimony, subsequently collapsed.

Koca warned the number of cases would rise as more tests were undertaken.

Turkish authorities have announced a series of measures to limit the spread of the virus by temporarily shutting schools and universities, as well as [public spaces](#) including cinemas.

The religious affairs authority, Diyanet, ordered the closure of around 90,000 mosques in Turkey on Friday, the day of particularly important prayers in the Muslim faith.

Mass prayers had already been suspended and the faithful were urged to pray at home.

Koca said the ministry has obtained the contact information for 372,000 people who have recently come from abroad.

"We are monitoring them through family doctors. We called 130,000 such individuals yesterday (Wednesday) alone to brief them," he said.

The minister said Turkey sent 500,000 coronavirus test kits to the United States after the country made an order.

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