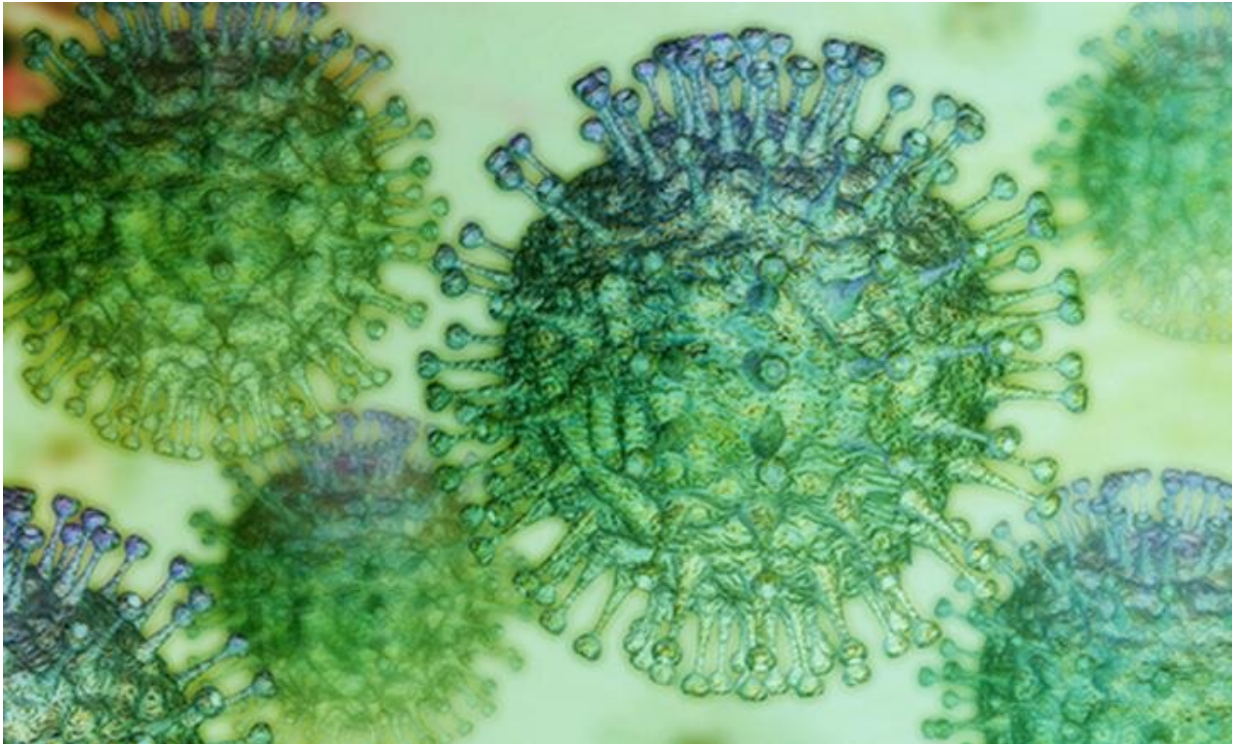


Bhutan in virus lockdown for the first time

August 11 2020



Coronavirus. Credit: European Centers for Disease Control

Bhutan has been largely shielded from coronavirus but on Tuesday, the remote Himalayan kingdom famous for measuring gross national happiness went into lockdown for the first time.

The country of 800,000 people between India and China has recorded just 113 novel [coronavirus](#) cases and is one of the few nations to report

zero deaths.

The lockdown ordered in the early hours of Tuesday allows only essential services for an initial five to six days, said Prime Minister Lotay Tshering, a doctor who continues to practise on weekends.

"Everyone is asked to stay home to protect themselves from the disease, should there be undetected, rampant transmissions," a statement from his office said.

The announcement came after a Bhutanese woman who had returned from Kuwait and released from quarantine after 30 days tested positive around 10 days later.

Three rapid antibody tests were positive during her time in quarantine, throughout which she was asymptomatic, but six PCR tests were all negative and she was discharged on July 26.

A seventh PCR test came back positive on Monday and since leaving quarantine, the woman was found to have travelled extensively in Bhutan, mixing with family and friends and even shopping.

As of midday, the [health ministry](#) had traced 210 people suspected to have come in contact with her, the [prime minister](#)'s office said.

The lockdown decision was made in a meeting by the virus task force that, according to the prime minister's office, stayed in touch with Bhutan's king "through the night".

After the announcement, many people rushed to the shops to buy essential items like rice, vegetables, eggs, [vegetable oil](#) and tobacco, an AFP correspondent said.

Karma Tenzin, a resident of the capital Thimphu, said he was well prepared as the government had warned people to be ready for weeks.

"So I had already stocked my kitchen with food and other necessary items to prepare for the [lockdown](#)," he said.

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