

Iran COVID infections jump after New Year holidays

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Iran's daily new COVID-19 infections reached a four-month high on Monday as the capital Tehran was put on the highest virus risk level, with authorities blaming increased travelling.

The Islamic republic is battling the Middle East's deadliest [coronavirus](#) outbreak, and case numbers have risen following a surge in trips during the Iranian new year holidays that started on March 18.

In the past 24 hours, 13,890 new coronavirus cases were recorded, [health](#) ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said in televised remarks.

It is the highest number of daily infections since December 4, and close to the peak of 14,051 positive cases recorded on November 28.

The new reported cases brought the total number of infections to over 1.94 million, according to Lari.

Health Minister Saeed Namaki said Iran is facing "one of the most severe waves" of coronavirus.

"Sadly, no one listened to me about managing travel, and today we're facing a great difficulty," he said, according to the ministry's website.

"We've now lost the reins (of the virus), and it's not clear when we can go below triple digit deaths."

Some officials, including Namaki, have admitted in the past that the virus numbers are likely higher than official figures.

'Fourth wave'

Tehran, with a population of over eight million, is now classified as "red" on the country's coronavirus risk scale.

Only essential services, such as food providers and health centres, remain open.

Most [major cities](#) in the western half of Iran such as Isfahan, Shiraz and Karaj are listed as red as well.

Lari called the spread "very concerning", and warned the rest of the country may soon follow.

Tehran was put on orange alert on March 28, leading to the closing of cinemas and theatres.

Authorities had warned of a concerning rise in the spread of the more contagious British variant of the disease and of a "fourth wave" prior to the holidays.

Iranians were allowed to travel to low-risk cities during the holidays, but were warned to leave or be fined if the level rose to orange or red.

In late March, deputy health minister Alireza Raisi criticised a significant lack of compliance with health protocols.

Iran has never imposed a full lockdown since the pandemic started.

Instead, it has resorted to limited and shifting measures, such as temporary bans on travelling or businesses.

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