

# Nine evacuated as Covid-19 hits Antarctic research base

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Nine staff at Argentina's La Esperanza research base had decided to wait to get their jabs in Argentina, fearing having to deal with possible side-effects in the extreme environment that is Antarctica.

For the first time since the start of the pandemic the coronavirus has reached an Argentine research base in Antarctica, causing the evacuation

of nine unvaccinated staff who tested positive for COVID-19, an official said Thursday.

Twenty-four of the 43 scientists and military personnel resident at Argentina's La Esperanza base have been infected, Patricia Ortuzar of the government's National Directorate of the Antarctic told AFP.

Nine of the 24, who have no symptoms, were evacuated to Buenos Aires by helicopter as a precaution.

They had been in Antarctica since before the start of Argentina's vaccination campaign in 2021, and were due to travel to the capital to be jabbed.

They had decided to wait to get their shots in Argentina, fearing having to deal with possible side-effects in the [extreme environment](#) that is Antarctica.

Previously, the icy continent's first cases were reported at a Chilean base in December 2020.

The situation at La Esperanza base was "under control", said Ortuzar.

The other 15 coronavirus-positive staff, also asymptomatic, remained at the base with the rest of the team. All are vaccinated.

All other Argentina bases remain COVID-free, Ortuzar added.

The La Esperanza base, built in 1952 in the extreme northwest of Antarctica, is one of 13 belonging to Argentina—six of them permanent.

In the winter months, Argentina has some 200 scientists, military personnel and assistants at its permanent bases, a number that roughly

doubles in summer.

The outbreak at La Esperanza started on January 12, when a base occupant was likely infected by a new arrival, said Ortuzar.

To prevent infection at its Antarctic outposts, Argentina has isolated and tested some 300 scientists and [military personnel](#) since December aboard an icebreaker which is currently bringing them back to Antarctica.

Like many other countries, Argentina is battling a third pandemic wave, with more than 100,000 cases reported daily.

The South American country of 45 million people has registered more than 7.4 million infections since March 2020, and 118,000 deaths.

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