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West Africa clamps down on borders as coronavirus cases rise

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Several West African countries on Monday closed borders and tightened travel restrictions in a bid to stem the spread of the coronavirus as the number of identified cases grows..

Compared to hotspots in Europe and Asia, the pandemic had been slow to spread across Africa, but West Africa's Benin on Monday became the continent's 28th country to record an infection, according to an AFP tally.

Numerous countries announced emergency measures, including Ivory Coast which said it was closing its borders for 15 days to all non-citizens travelling from countries where more than 100 infections have been detected.

The move came after Senegal, which recorded its 27th case on Monday, suspended flights from seven European and North African countries.

Experts have warned that sub-Saharan Africa, which has often fragile medical infrastructure and is already struggling with outbreaks of Ebola and measles, could be particularly hard-hit by the pandemic.

Many of the continent's initial cases were detected in people who had arrived from virus-stricken Europe.

Ghana on Monday closed schools and banned public gatherings, as well as barring entry to non-citizens who have, within the last 14 days, been to

a country that has recorded 200 or more cases.

West African heavyweight Nigeria meanwhile announced a $135 million fund to support businesses hit by the crisis.

Ivory Coast's government confirmed the country's sixth case on Monday, as well its first person to have recovered from a coronavirus infection.

The government also said that from Wednesday it will close schools and universities for 30 days, and nightclubs, cinemas and theatres—but not restaurants or bars—for 15 days. It also banned gatherings of more than 50 people.

Senegal, which had already closed schools and called a halt to celebrations of the 60th anniversary of independence from France, said that flights to and from France, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, Spain, Algeria and Tunisia will no longer run from Wednesday.

Islamic authorities in the country have also asked the faithful to not attend several religious festivals planned for this month.

East along the Sahel, Chad in Central Africa said it would close its airports to all countries for two weeks from midnight on Thursday, though it has yet to record a coronavirus case.

In East Africa, where Tanzania and Somalia registered their first COVID-19 cases on Monday, some countries have also shuttered borders, closed schools, and prohibited large public gatherings.

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