

France reports 89 new coronavirus deaths in last 24 hours: official

March 18 2020



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The coronavirus epidemic has caused 89 new deaths across France over the last 24 hours bringing the total death toll in the country to 264, the top French health official said on Wednesday.

"We have an epidemic that is rapidly becoming more serious," Jerome Salomon told reporters, adding that France now had 9,134 confirmed cases, 3,626 of whom were in hospital.

He said that the number of new cases was doubling every day, adding that testing was only being done on those with breathing difficulties, meaning the real number of infected including those not seriously affected could be far higher.

The new toll as France was in the second day of a nationwide lockdown declared by President Emmanuel Macron to battle the virus, with people allowed outside their houses only for essential trips.

Government spokeswoman Sibeth Ndiaye had earlier admitted that France was undergoing "logistical difficulties" with the supply of sanitary masks while denouncing "unacceptable" thefts of masks from hospitals.

The government is asking lawmakers to allow the declaration of a national health emergency giving the executive special powers to battle the coronavirus, Prime Minister Edouard Philippe confirmed on Wednesday.

"Our country is going through a health crisis unprecedented for a century. The crisis means we need to take strong measures to warn about, contain and manage the epidemic," he said.

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