

Solomon Islands record first coronavirus case

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The Solomon Islands announced they have lost the battle to stay free of the coronavirus, leaving just nine small, remote territories that have not reported a single case.

Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare told the Pacific island nation in a televised address that a student who recently arrived from the Philippines on a repatriation flight carrying 96 passengers had returned a positive test.

"It pains me to say that we have lost our COVID-19-free status despite our collective effort to prevent the pandemic from entering our country," Sogavare said Saturday.

He urged the population of 600,000 in the archipelago to remain calm and said contact tracing and other measures to prevent the spread of the virus had been activated and there was no need for a lockdown.

The [student](#), who tested negative three times in the Philippines before boarding the flight, was found positive in a routine test on return to the capital Honiara and is now in isolation.

Eighteen other students who tested positive remain in quarantine in Manila.

Since the Solomons borders were closed in March, more than 400 students have been stuck in the Philippines, which has been hard hit by the virus.

Under pressure from parents, Solomons officials arranged three repatriation flights with the first arriving last Tuesday.

Despite confirming its first case of COVID-19, Sogavare said the government would continue working to bring the remaining students home.

Only the small and remote island nations and territories of Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu are believed to be still free of the virus.

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