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5.7 magnitude earthquake in Utah about 10 miles west of Salt Lake City

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Gaza's isolation delayed arrival of the pandemic, now loose on vulnerable population

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Jordan on lock-down, Egypt shut pyramids, Mideast confronts coronavirus
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Jordan on lock-down, Egypt shut pyramids, PA orders 14-day home confinement

03.22.20 – Su - - - News Placed in Mar 18 spot – Wednesday
Comet ATLAS will come closest to Earth on May 23 & see with eye by May 1

03.14.20 – We -

5.7 magnitude earthquake in Utah about 10 miles west of Salt Lake City

03.14.20 – We -

5.7 magnitude earthquake in Utah knocks out power to thousands and diverts flights

By Jason Hanna and Konstantin Toropin, CNN

Updated 9:41 PM ET, Wed March 18, 2020

Magnitude 5.7 earthquake 3 miles from Magna, UT · Mar 18, 8:09 AM

(CNN)A 5.7 magnitude earthquake shook the Salt Lake City area Wednesday morning, cutting power to tens of thousands and suspending work at Utah's public health lab amid the coronavirus pandemic, officials said.

Flights to Salt Lake International Airport were diverted, departures were postponed and terminals and concourses were evacuated so engineers could inspect the facilities, the airport said.

The quake was centered about 10 miles west of Salt Lake City, near the city of Magna, starting at 7:09 a.m. (9:09 a.m. ET), the US Geological Survey said.

People in downtown Salt Lake City left buildings and gathered outside after the quake, talking about the shaking, CNN affiliate KSL reported.

"It didn't feel like a small earthquake at all. I heard things in my kitchen falling," Michael McCarlie, who lives in an apartment at the City Creek Landing development in the capital, told KSL.

This is the state's most powerful quake since 1992, when a magnitude 5.9 temblor struck the St. George area, Utah's Division of Emergency Management said.

Operations at the state's public health laboratory were halted as the building was assessed for damage, the state Department of Health said.

The state's coronavirus hotline, which residents may call to request tests and seek information, was down after the quake, Gov. Gary Herbert said on Twitter -- though the health department said a temporary information line was available.

The Department of Health said its lab is being assessed for damage, and testing will resume when the building is "determined to be safe."

"There were no samples being tested at the time of the earthquake," the department said in a media advisory posted on Twitter. "Additionally, no samples or laboratory equipment were damaged during the earthquake."

Commercial labs in the state are working and still processing Covid-19 tests, the department said.

By the early afternoon there were about 10,000 customers without power, down from 73,000 immediately after the quake, Rocky Mountain Power reported.

"Please stay away from the downtown area while crews assess damage," Herbert said. "Unless you work in public safety, or are an essential employee, remain at home or telework."

The quake comes as Utah residents, like people across the world, are adjusting to changes brought by the coronavirus pandemic, including canceling schools and limiting mass gatherings.

It is very likely that you will feel aftershocks today.

Here's the shaking intensity map for this earthquake. As you can see, the stronger shaking is felt around the magna area and less intense shaking radiates outward.

"I know the last thing we need right now is an earthquake, but here we are, and it sounds like aftershocks are likely," Salt Lake City Mayor Erin Mendenhall said on Twitter.

At the city's iconic Mormon temple, the quake dislodged the trumpet of the angel statue atop its highest spire, video from KSL showed.

"The trumpet on the Angel Moroni statue fell off, and there is minor displacement of some of the temple's smaller spire stones," said Daniel Woodruff, a spokesman for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

BREAKING: Angel Moroni statue on Salt Lake Temple loses its trumpet in Wasatch

Aerial photos show the fallen trumpet appeared to have landed on the roof of the temple near the base of its spires.

School districts in the area have been offering grab-and-go lunch pickup programs during the coronavirus break, but some districts canceled those programs Wednesday because of the earthquake, CNN affiliate KTVX reported.

Airport reopens

The airport said Wednesday afternoon it was resuming operations after checking for damage.

"The airport has completed the security sweep and is preparing to allow passengers through. ... Flights will begin arriving and departing," the airport posted on Twitter.

A water line that was damaged in Concourse D has been repaired, the airport said.

The first flight left for Dallas just before 3 p.m., the airport said later.

Because fewer people are flying during the coronavirus pandemic, "evacuating the terminal buildings was easier" than it would have normally been, airport director Bill Wyatt told reporters.

The runways and taxiways were not damaged, Wyatt said. Some inbound planes were diverted to Denver or elsewhere, Wyatt said.

The airport said a road to the airport initially was closed after the quake, but eventually was reopened late Wednesday morning so passengers could be picked up.

Epicenter, near Magna

The Utah Department of Transportation said it didn't appear that the roads it's responsible for were damaged, but workers were checking to make sure. Parts of Interstate 80 were temporarily closed so inspection crews could look at bridges, it said.

Several aftershocks were recorded within 20 minutes of the main quake, according to the USGS, and dozens were recorded later, including one with a 4.6 magnitude Wednesday afternoon.

Generally in Utah, earthquakes greater than magnitude 5 happen once every 10 years, and quakes greater than magnitude 6 happen once every 50 years, the USGS says.

That statement takes into account instrumentation records dating back to 1962 and historical records dating back to the 1850s, the USGS says.

CNN's Daniel Burke, Dave Hennen, Judson Jones, Andy Rose and Theresa Waldrop contributed to this report.

03.23.20 – Mo -

Tighter regulations on Friday March 20 closed the open-air markets at noon

Friday 3-20-20

03.23.20

Traders fume as police shutter markets over coronavirus

Local business owners say Health Ministry regulations unclear; PM holds consultations to devise financial plan as outbreak continues to wreak havoc on Israel's economy

Ro'i Rubinstein, Gilad Cohen | Published: 03.23.20, 12:19

The Health Ministry's new regulations prohibiting the operation of markets in an effort to curb the spread of the coronavirus came into effect Sunday, causing much confusion and anger among merchants and patrons.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced new tighter regulations on Friday but said they would not apply to open-air markets.

Tel Aviv's Carmel market was shut down Sunday morning by police. Some traders arrived in early the morning despite the new regulations coming into effect, hoping that some customers would be buying.

But at 9:30am, police and municipality inspectors entered the market compound in large numbers, demanding that all merchants immediately close their businesses and warning of fines for whoever failed to comply.

"Our spirits are not too high. Thousands of families are affected by this, but we must respect the decision," said Itzik, the owner of a souvenir stall.

"This is just the beginning, and we understand that there's a problem with this virus. God sneezed and the entire world has gone mad ever since," he said.

"This is damaging for many people who struggle to make ends meet and now you're finishing them off," said one trader, known by the moniker "Yina'al Ha'Olam" (to hell with the world).

Moshe owns a bakery in the market and had been working since the early morning hours when he was shut down by police. He pointed an accusing finger at the heads of Israel's two largest parties, who are currently battling for control of the Knesset.

"At least let us finish this day," he said. "Now everything will probably go in the trash or we'll find somewhere to donate it. What kind of government is this? Either they close the

entire country or don't. [Likud leader Benjamin] Netanyahu and [Blue & White chief Benny] Gantz don't care about the country, only themselves."

Disgruntled patrons also shared their discontent over the new regulations, with some even questioning how a market operating under the open sky is any more dangerous than a supermarket.

"You can't stand at a distance of two meters from someone at the supermarket and about a thousand different people touch your food," said a local who often shops at the market.

"The food here is hygienic and delicious, it's the best."

In Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market, the traders' union told its members to open as usual, before being shut down by police as well several hours later.

Union leader Tali Friedman said she was told that the market would operate as usual on Sunday and instructed the traders to open up in the morning, but police arrived at around noon and shut it down.

"The prime minister's new orders should allow Mahane Yehuda market to stay open, there is no place safer than Mahane Yehuda," said Friedman. "Taiwan and Singapore didn't close their markets and there's no reason for Israel to close its markets."

"We thought the instructions we got on Friday meant we opened as usual, but we don't really know," said Rami, owner of a pickle stall.

"What good would it do to open the market if people are not allowed out of the house anyway? The market is much safer than the crowded supermarkets."

Netanyahu on Sunday conducted a round of consultations to devise a strategic economic plan as well as an updated, extensive and significant relief package including assistance for the self-employed, wage earners, businesses and households.

03.22.20 – Su -

PA orders all West Bank Palestinians into 14-day home confinement

03.22.20

PA orders all West Bank Palestinians into 14-day home confinement

Order announced by Shtayyeh on television goes into force at 10 pm local time and exempts medical personnel, pharmacists, grocers and bakers; decision comes just hours after first two cases of virus confirmed in Gaza

Reuters,AP| Published: 03.22.20 , 14:38

The Palestinian government on Sunday ordered Palestinians in the West Bank confined to their homes for two weeks as a precaution against the spread of coronavirus.

The order, announced by Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh on television, goes into force at 10 pm local time.

Medical personnel, pharmacists, grocers and bakers would be exempt, Shtayyeh said.

In the West Bank, 55 cases of coronavirus have been diagnosed, with 17 recovering.

Most of the cases were in the city of Bethlehem.

There have been no deaths from the virus reported in the Palestinian areas.

Sunday's announcement came just hours after the Palestinian Health Ministry confirmed the first two cases of the virus in the Gaza Strip.

The two, who recently returned to Gaza from Pakistan, have been moved to isolation at a hospital in the southern city of Rafah.

The development added to fears of a potential outbreak in crowded Gaza, which has an overstretched health care system after years of an Israeli-Egyptian blockade, cross-border conflicts with Israel and Palestinian political divides.

Hundreds of Gazans have returned home in the past two weeks, but only 92 people have been examined, highlighting the territory's limited tested capacity.

Gaza has been mostly cut off from the world as Israel and Egypt imposed severe movement restrictions following the 2007 takeover by the Hamas terror group. This is believed to have delayed the arrival of the virus.

Israel and Egypt in the past two years relaxed some travel restrictions on Gaza's 2 million residents, but they closed their borders again last week as those two countries struggle to contain the coronavirus spreading on their territories. Gaza residents are still allowed to return home.

More than 1,270 people are quarantined at hospitals, hotels and schools after crossing into Gaza from Israel and Egypt, the ministry said.

On Saturday, Hamas' Interior Ministry shut down wedding halls and banned weekly street markets as precautionary measures.

The vast majority of infected people recover from the virus. For most, it produces only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. But the coronavirus can cause severe illness, including pneumonia, and even death, for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems.

03.22.20 – Su -

Mandelblit blocks Likud move to limit the Knesset activity and people gathered

03.22.20 – Su -

Mandelblit to Supreme Court: Government must obey the law

AG last week told Likud ministers that government has no authority over the Knesset, judicial source says attorney general is the last line of defense against violation of human rights and the rule of law, and is involved in all regulatory decisions

Tova Tsimukij Published: 03.22.20 , 11:22

Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit warned Sunday that democracy is being tested and said that he would to safeguard Israel's democratic political system.

"Now more than ever, we must stand guard to ensure government actions are taken in accordance with the law," wrote Mandelblit in a letter to the Supreme Court. The court is set to hear motions against certain government actions taken to slow the spread of coronavirus, such as digital surveillance.

Late last week, Mandelblit blocked an effort by Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party to include the Knesset among workplaces that must limit their activity and the number of people gathered at any one time.

Likud ministers Dudi Amsalem, Ze'ev Elkin and Yariv Levin, all close allies of Netanyahu, argued in a cabinet meeting Thursday that that Knesset activity should be suspended in accordance with Health Ministry guidelines.

But Mandelblit came out against the initiative, claiming that the government has no authority over parliament and Knesset activity must continue, while guidelines limiting the number of people in one room and other restrictions can be observed.

"The attorney general's office is working around the clock," said a judicial source.

"Mandelblit is ensuring human rights and the rule of law are maintained," he said, describing the attorney general as the last line of defense in ensuring the law is observed.

"No regulations are introduced without the approval of the attorney general's office, including the suspension of tenders for specific medical equipment and the use of drugs for non-specified use to be administered to coronavirus patients," the source said.

"Staffers are assisting in lifting some red tape and regulations to speed up processes to ensure the supply of vital goods for public consumption and more."

03.21.20 – Sa -

Netanyahu offers to step down September 2021 in unity deal to Benny Gantz

03.21.20

Netanyahu offers to step down next year in unity deal

In an interview with Channel 12, PM called on an 'emergency' unity government with Blue & White headed by Benny Gantz, who Netanyahu says would assume the post of premier for a second year-and-a-half term in September 2021; Lapid dismisses PM's offer as insincere

Associated Press| Published: 03.21.20 , 22:40

The prime minister Saturday said he is ready to step down next year as part of a proposed power-sharing agreement with his chief rival meant to steer the country through the coronavirus crisis and end a year-long political deadlock.

Benjamin Netanyahu made his proposal during a nationally televised interview, calling for the formation of a three-year "emergency" unity government with the rival Blue and White Party.

Netanyahu told Channel 12 TV that he would remain as prime minister for the first year and a half, and allow Blue and White leader Benny Gantz to assume the post for a second year-and-a-half term in September 2021. He said each party would have an equal number of seats in the Cabinet.

"I will give up the prime minister's post in another year and a half," Netanyahu said.

Yair Lapid, a senior Blue and White leader, dismissed Netanyahu's unity offer as insincere. "Next week, we will go to choose a new parliament speaker and work to battle coronavirus for the good of the people," he said.

Israel is facing a growing threat from the coronavirus pandemic. It has detected nearly 900 cases and on Friday reported its first death. With the public largely confined to their homes, the economy appears to be in great danger, with tens of thousands of people losing their jobs.

Blue and White has accused Netanyahu of using the coronavirus crisis to undermine the country's democratic institutions and try to derail his scheduled trial on corruption charges. Senior members of Gantz' party have expressed skepticism at previous power-sharing overtures by Netanyahu, concerned that he would not follow through on his promises to cede power.

Israel this month held its third inconclusive election in under a year. Netanyahu's Likud emerged as the largest single party, but fell short of securing a required parliamentary majority. A slim majority of lawmakers has endorsed Gantz as their choice for prime minister, though it is unclear whether he will be able to cobble together a governing coalition either.

Gantz now has just over three weeks to form a new government. In the meantime, he is trying to push through legislation in parliament that would in effect prevent Netanyahu from serving as prime minister in the future. The legislation would impose term limits on the prime minister and bar a politician indicted on criminal charges, like Netanyahu, from being prime minister.

Last week, Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein, a member of Likud, suspended the parliament's activities, preventing the newly elected legislature from choosing a new speaker and forming the committees needed to push through Blue and White's legislative agenda.

Netanyahu's hand-picked justice minister last week also shut down most of the court system, delaying the prime minister's trial until at least May.

Netanyahu's opponents have accused him and his surrogates of undermining the country's democratic institutions. Blue and White planned to file a Supreme Court challenge on Sunday requiring parliament to resume its activities.

With the public ordered to stay at home, tens of thousands of people tuned in on social media late Saturday to a "virtual protest," accusing Netanyahu of endangering the country's democratic foundations. Former directors of the Mossad and Shin Bet security agencies were among the speakers.

"Benjamin Netanyahu, get yourself together and release us from being your hostages," said Yuval Diskin, a former Shin Bet director. "Do it for the good of the country and the people." □

More than 275,000 people have been infected by the coronavirus worldwide. The virus has killed more than 11,000 people, while more than 88,000 have recovered.

Most people only experience minor flu-like symptoms from the coronavirus and recover within a few weeks, but the virus is highly contagious and can be spread by those who appear well. It can cause severe illness, including pneumonia, in some patients, particularly the elderly and those with underlying health problems.

03.19.20

Israel to examine all those with fever, sore throat, shortness of breath or cough.

03.19.20

Israel opens coronavirus tests to all with symptoms

New clinics run by HMOs will be available for those who show signs of virus but had not previously met criteria for testing; measure also helps locate 'outbreak clusters' within certain areas

Itay Gal | Published: 03.19.20, 12:10

The Health Ministry has authorized HMOs to begin extending its coronavirus testing to include those who are not in quarantine and who had not previously met criteria for testing such as return from abroad or contact with a confirmed case.

The tests will be carried out at specially designated sites for those who develop symptoms that may indicate the presence of the disease.

The clinics have been set up over the past week to examine those with fever and respiratory symptoms such as sore throat, shortness of breath or cough.

The clinics are subject to special measures aimed at preventing the exposure of other patients to the virus.

Visits to the clinics will be done independently or through a doctor's referral obtained via online services.

The clinics are to be open across the country, and doctors will be able to take a sample with Health Ministry approval.

It is thought that the samples will help locate thousands of coronavirus patients who may be infected and need to be isolated.

The clinics, nicknamed "sentinel clinics," will also sporadically submit their samples to a national database that tracks "outbreak clusters" in various locations.

The Health Ministry said Thursday that Israel's total number of coronavirus patients has reached 529.

"We will reach a situation in which there are many hundreds of new patients each day, and possibly more," Moshe Bar-Siman-Tov, director-general of the Health Ministry, told Army Radio on Wednesday.

The Mossad spy agency said Thursday that it had managed to obtain 100,000 testing kits for coronavirus. The Health Ministry said however that the kits were missing the vital swabs needed to carry out the tests.

03.17.20 – Tu -

Virus patient escaped hospital quarantine & traveled 81 miles to Be'er Sheva by train

03.17.20

Suspected coronavirus patient nabbed after fleeing Israeli hospital

Police say the man is suspected to have escaped from a hospital in the northern city of Hadera and took a train to Be'er Sheva, some 130 km away, where he was detained by officers in hazmat suits

Ynet| Published: 03.17.20 , 14:25

A suspected coronavirus patient was detained in southern Israel on Tuesday after he fled a hospital in the north, some 130 km (81 miles) away.

The man, who took a train from the city of Hadera to the city of Be'er Sheva, was arrested at 12 am close at a train station near Ben-Gurion University and taken to Soroka Medical Center for examination.

Police officers in hazmat suits entered the train wearing hazmat suits and escorted the man, suspected to have escaped a coronavirus quarantine at The Hillel Yaffe Medical Center.

Once the suspected patients had been escorted, the police took the details of all the passengers who were inside the train at the time of the incident.

Police said on Monday evening they received a report about a patient who is suspected to have escaped from an emergency room and was heading to Be'er Sheva by train.

Upon receiving the report, local police officers contacted Israel Railways and the train was stopped at Be'er Sheva North train station for an hour in order to locate the suspected coronavirus patient.

Police say they are calling on the public to adhere to the Health Ministry's guidelines in order not to disrupt the national effort to combat the virus outbreak in Israel.

"Israel Police will continue to enforce the Health Ministry's directives to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, in the public domain, businesses and elsewhere, all with the aim of maintaining public order and health."

03.17.20 – Tu -

EU 61,098 cases & 2,740 dead, majority in Italy, bans foreign travelers for 30 days

03.17.20 – Tu -

EU to ban most foreign travelers for 30 days to curb virus

The plan which was to be implemented immediately and was decided after a three hour conference call of leaders, exempts long-term EU residents, diplomats, some healthcare and transport workers

Associated Press| Updated: 03.17.20 , 23:25

European Union leaders agreed Tuesday to immediately impose travel restrictions on most foreigners entering Europe for at least 30 days to limit the spread of the new coronavirus, and to set up fast-track transport lanes to keep vital medical equipment, food, and goods flowing smoothly inside the bloc.

As the virus case count in Europe climbed to over 60,000 and with more than 2,700 people dead, nervous national governments have introduced quick-fix measures such as partial border closures and quarantines with little consultation. The EU sought over three hours of video talks to forge a united front against an illness that is also wreaking economic havoc.

"We reaffirmed the need to work together and do everything necessary to tackle the crisis and its consequences," European Council President Charles Michel told reporters. He said the 27 EU countries agreed to impose border restrictions on tourism and non-essential business "as fast as possible."

The plan exempts long-term EU residents, diplomats, some healthcare and transport workers.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said her proposal for the restrictions "got a lot of support by the member states. It's up to them now to implement. They said they will immediately do that."

Chancellor Angela Merkel said the leaders agreed in a conference call to an entry ban with "very, very limited exceptions," and that Germany would start implementing it immediately.

Merkel said citizens of Switzerland, Liechtenstein, the United Kingdom, and Norway are exempt. The EU leaders also agreed to coordinate the repatriation of EU citizens stranded outside the bloc, she said.

Von der Leyen said they also backed a proposal to set up "green lanes" for trucks and other priority vehicles aimed at beating the traffic jams that have formed around crossing points on internal borders, where no ID or vehicle checks were required just days ago. Those transport guidelines, she said, "have to be implemented now".

The leaders agreed to meet again for a third video conference and to cancel a summit they planned to attend in Brussels late next week.

"We are ready to do everything that is required. We shall not hesitate to take additional measures as the situation evolves," von der Leyen told reporters.

In a new update Tuesday, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control said that 61,098 cases of the coronavirus have now been reported in Europe and that 2,740 people have died, the overwhelming majority in Italy.

After Italy, ground zero in Europe's battle with COVID-19, Spain and now France have imposed lock-downs, confining citizens to their homes except for urgent business like buying food or heading to any hospital that might still have the capacity to treat them. Nine countries have informed the European Commission, the EU's executive body, that they've reintroduced ID checks inside Europe's passport-free Schengen Area. Among them are Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland, which all took unilateral action to halt the influx of migrants in 2015.

Indeed, it is a similar challenge that leaders are grappling with as they confront the coronavirus -- how to ensure that the fraying solidarity among partners in the same European club does not completely unravel as the crisis deepens.

Asked Monday whether Europe can ever return to real ID-check free travel after this, Merkel said: "I hope so. But it's been shown that coordination didn't work well everywhere the way one would have hoped."

The EU proposals endorsed Tuesday are relatively modest, as Europe's centralized powers in this crisis are limited. While it may be a Union, the world's biggest trading bloc remains an accumulation of 27 individual countries, some with populist and far-right governments that reject orders from Brussels.

"In recent days, European countries failed to coordinate their approach," Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis said Saturday as he announced the closure of retail businesses in his country. "We didn't need to wait for Brussels to give us any advice."

In times of crisis, Europe's machinery is painfully slow. Like a super-butler dealing with an unpredictable 27-headed master, the EU massive bureaucracy offers ideas, proposes plans and occasionally cajoles but often it must wait for approval.

03.22.20 – Su -

Gaza's isolation delayed arrival of the pandemic, now loose on vulnerable population

03.22.20

Arrival of virus in Gaza raises fears about vulnerable areas

Health official estimates territory **can only handle first 100 cases** if they appear gradually in current capacity; only 92 from hundreds who returned recently from overseas tested Associated Press| Published: **03.22.20** , 19:19

The arrival of the coronavirus in the Gaza Strip, an impoverished enclave where the health care system has been gutted by years of conflict, raised fears Sunday **the pandemic may soon prey on some of the most vulnerable populations in the world.**

Authorities in Gaza, which has been under an Israeli and Egyptian blockade since the Islamic militant group Hamas seized power from rival Palestinian forces in 2007, confirmed its first two cases overnight, in returnees who had come from Pakistan.

An outbreak could wreak havoc on the Palestinian territory, which is home to over 2 million people, many living in cramped cities and refugee camps. There are similar concerns about a catastrophe if the virus turns up in war-torn Syria, Libya or Yemen. The virus causes only minor flu-like symptoms in most people, who recover in a matter of weeks, but it is highly contagious and can cause severe illness or death in some patients, particularly the elderly and those with underlying health problems. Severe cases are often only able to breathe with respirators.

Abdelnasser Soboh, director of the World Health Organization's Gaza office, said the territory only has 62 ventilators, with all but 15 already in use. He estimates the territory needs 50 to 100 more to address an outbreak.

With its current capacity, Soboh estimated Gaza's hospitals can handle the first 100 cases if they come in gradually.

"If there is a spread to hundreds, this will cause a challenge to the health care system," Soboh said.

Gaza's isolation likely delayed the arrival of the coronavirus, which has infected more than **300,000 people worldwide and killed more than 13,000**. More than 90,000 people have recovered.

Hundreds of Gazans have returned home in the past two weeks, but only 92 people have been examined, highlighting the territory's limited testing capacity. **More than 1,270 people have been quarantined at hospitals, hotels and schools** after crossing into Gaza from Israel and Egypt, according to the Health Ministry.

The ministry said **the two who tested positive had been isolated at a field hospital upon arrival and did not mingle with others in quarantine.**

Several countries in the Middle East have sealed their borders and ordered the closure of nonessential businesses. On **Friday, Hamas ordered the closure of wedding halls and weekly street markets**, after earlier closing Gaza's schools. **Sanitation crews have also been patrolling the streets and public buildings, spraying disinfectant.**

Jordan on lock-down, Egypt shut pyramids, Mideast confronts coronavirus

03.22.20 – Su -

Jordan goes on lock-down, Egypt shuts pyramids to visitors, Mideast confronts coronavirus

As the death toll in Iran continues to climb, countries around the Middle East restrict movements closing down schools and banning gatherings, while war-torn Syria has yet to report a single case of coronavirus

Associated Press| Published: 03.22.20 , 16:36

Air raid sirens echoed across Jordan's capital Saturday to mark the start of a three-day curfew, the latest mass lockdown in the Middle East aimed at containing the coronavirus, which has claimed another 123 lives in Iran, home to the region's worst outbreak.

The latest deaths bring Iran's overall toll to 1,556 amid 20,610 confirmed cases, according to figures released by the Health Ministry. Iran has faced widespread criticism for its lagging response to the outbreak, which has even infected and killed some senior officials.

In one of the strictest measures yet, Jordan has ordered all shops to close and all people to stay off the streets until at least Tuesday when it plans to announce specific times for shopping.

Authorities have already arrested 392 people accused of violating the curfew, said Amer Sartawi, a spokesman for the Public Security Directorate. He warned that anyone violating the orders would face legal action.

Several countries in the Middle East have closed schools, universities and nonessential businesses. Many are threatening fines or jail time to those caught violating the decrees. In the Gaza Strip, the Health Ministry early Sunday confirmed the first two cases of coronavirus in the blockaded Palestinian territory. The development added to fears of a potential outbreak in crowded Gaza, which has an overstretched health care system after years of an Israeli-Egyptian blockade, cross-border conflicts with Israel and Palestinian political division.

Egypt announced that all museums and archaeological sites, including the famed pyramids at Giza, would be closed from Monday until the end of March. Mostafa Waziri, head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, said authorities would sterilize all sites during the closure.

Egypt also announced the temporary suspension of Friday prayers and other congregations in all mosques. The Coptic Orthodox Church canceled all services and wedding parties and said funeral processions would be limited to family members of the deceased.

Egypt has reported 285 cases and eight deaths, and there are increasing calls for a curfew. The most populous Arab nation is home to more than 100 million people. Cairo, the capital, is one of the most densely populated cities on earth, with more than 20 million residents.

Iran has been much slower to take action against the virus. It has urged people not to travel during the Persian New Year, a major national holiday, but many appear to be ignoring the guidance. Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said the number of cases has increased in many popular tourist destinations.

Iran has not ordered businesses to close, though many have done so on their own. Authorities only began closing popular religious pilgrimage sites earlier this week, long after the first virus cases were detected. There are concerns the country's health care infrastructure, weakened by severe U.S. sanctions, could be overwhelmed.

Most people only experience minor flu-like symptoms from the coronavirus and recover within a few weeks, but the virus is highly contagious and can be spread by those who appear well. It can cause severe illness, including pneumonia, in some patients, particularly the elderly and those with underlying health problems.

More than 275,000 people have been infected worldwide. The virus has killed more than 11,000 people, while more than 88,000 have recovered.

Saturday is Mother's Day in the Middle East, and many took to social media to lament the fact that they would not be able to visit family members. Others thanked mothers who spent the holiday working as doctors or nurses at hospitals. One popular online greeting card praised mothers as the original advocates of hand-washing.

In Iraq, Lt. Gen. Othman al-Ghanimi, the army chief of staff, ordered a 50% reduction in on-duty personnel. Officers already on leave were instructed not to return until March 31, and women were granted extended leave.

Iraq, which has reported 193 cases and 14 deaths from the coronavirus, is still battling remnants of the Islamic State group.

In war-torn Syria, which has yet to report any cases, the military said it was distributing masks and gloves to soldiers and suspending group sports as a precautionary measure. It said it was also suspending all recruitment until April 22.

In the United Arab Emirates, the country's National Media Council announced a temporary ban on "the distribution of all print newspapers, magazines and marketing material" beginning Tuesday, saying it was a measure to stop the spread of the virus. It said subscribers and shopping center outlets would be exempt.

Dr. Farida al-Hosani, a spokeswoman at the Ministry of Health and Prevention, separately asked the public to stay away from malls and restaurants, which remain open in the UAE.

The tiny, energy-rich nation of Qatar meanwhile warned citizens and residents to honor home quarantine rules. The state-run Qatar News Agency said authorities "captured 10 people" who broke the rules. It said those who disobey the orders could face prosecution.

In the West Bank, Palestinian security forces arrested 20 Muslim preachers for allegedly violating a ban on holding Friday prayers, the Voice of Palestine reported. The Palestinian Authority, which governs parts of the West Bank, has closed mosques and barred all group prayers.

The Palestinian Authority has reported 52 confirmed cases, including 17 who recovered. Jordan has reported 85 infections, including one who recovered. Qatar has reported 460 cases, including 10 who recovered.

Even authorities in eastern Libya, who have yet to report any cases, suspended all public transportation and ordered the closure of nonessential businesses. The government there is allied with Khalifa Hifter, whose forces control much of the war-torn country. The U.N.-supported government in the west, which also has no reported cases, declared a nightly curfew starting Sunday in areas under its control, including the capital Tripoli. It announced all mosques, educational facilities and shops would be closed and banned wedding parties, funerals, and public transportation.

Yemen also has reported no cases but the internationally recognized government announced a temporary suspension of Friday prayers and congregations in mosques in areas under its control.

03.22.20 – Su -

Comet ATLAS will come closest to Earth on May 23 & see with eye by May 1

03.22.20 – Su -

How to see bright Comet ATLAS

Posted by Eddie Irizarry in SPACE | [March 22, 2020](#)

Recently discovered comet C/2019 Y4 (ATLAS) isn't bright enough to see with the unaided eye ... yet. But it's getting brighter. [Will it provide a good show or fizzle out?](#) Click here to learn more.

Sharing is caring!

Black background with a few white dots and one large fuzzy green dot.

A nice image of Comet C/2019 Y4 (ATLAS) by Efrain Morales from Aguadilla, Puerto Rico. The marked object is a distant galaxy.

A recently discovered comet is getting the attention of astronomers and sky enthusiasts as it's become brighter than expected in the last few days. Astronomers using the ATLAS (Asteroid Terrestrial-impact Last Alert System) in [Hawaii discovered Comet C/2019 Y4 \(ATLAS\) on December 28, 2019](#). As of mid-late March, it shines at about the brightness of an 8th-magnitude star – not visible to the eye yet – but within reach of medium-sized telescopes in dark skies. The comet is currently crossing Mars' orbit and is approaching the inner solar system. As it gets closer to us, it'll get brighter still. You'll find charts for observers at the bottom of this post.

Comet ATLAS should become bright enough to be easily visible in binoculars, and perhaps bright enough to be seen with the unaided eye from dark sky locations.

Just know that comets are notoriously erratic and inherently unpredictable! We will have to wait to see how Comet Atlas performs.

Astronomer Alessandro Marchini, director of the Astronomical Observatory at the University of Siena in Italy – whose death toll from COVID-19 ramped up dramatically yesterday – sent the video below last night. He wrote:

During this surreal period of the health emergency for the Covid-19, I'm trying to use our social channels to entertain people forced at home. This evening I observed the comet C/2019 Y4 ATLAS during a Facebook Live streaming and here is a time-lapse I made with the images I acquired with our telescope. I hope all is fine with you.

Thank you, Alessandro, and please stay safe.

Comet C/2019 Y4 (ATLAS) will come closest to Earth on May 23, 2020. Its perihelion or closest approach to the sun will occur on May 31, 2020.

If predictions are correct, Comet ATLAS might reach a visual magnitude of +5 around May 1, 2020. That is theoretically bright enough to be seen with the eye, but the fuzziness of faint comets can make them harder to spot than comparably bright stars. When looking for fuzzy objects, it's best to use averted vision: [explanation here](#).

How bright will the comet get after that? Estimates of Comet ATLAS's peak brightness range from magnitude +2 to -6 during perihelion or closest approach to the sun, but please know that many comets fizzle and never reach their expected brightnesses. We will have to wait and see.

Concentric colored circles on a black background with one long parabolic curve cutting through them.

Orbit of Comet C/2019 Y4 (ATLAS) Courtesy of NASA/JPL.

How close to our planet will the comet come? The celestial visitor will pass at a huge distance, at some 72,610,769 million miles away (116,855,706 km).

Comet C/2019 Y4 (ATLAS) will pass very close the sun, and thus may disintegrate before becoming bright enough to be seen with the unaided eye.

It will pass at some 23,517,819 miles (37,848,261 km) from the sun, which is closer to our star than Mercury's elliptical orbit (about 36 million miles or 57.9 million km on average).

Calculations by NASA/JPL indicate Comet ATLAS takes some 6,025 years to complete an orbit around the sun. Observations show it has a similar orbit to the Great Comet of 1844, which suggest Comet Atlas may be a fragment of the same 1844 comet.

Will Comet C/2019 Y4 (ATLAS) provide a good show or just fizzle out? Let's keep a close eye on it, just in case! Bookmark this article, as we'll provide updates and new photos when we can ...

Here are some charts for you.

Star chart with Big Dipper and comet location.

Location of Comet C/2019 Y4 (ATLAS) in late March 2020. This chart faces north-northeast from a temperate latitude in the Northern Hemisphere. The time is around 9 p.m. local daylight (8 p.m. if you're not using daylight time) for all locations. In late March, the comet requires a small or medium-sized telescope, but it may be visible in binoculars very soon! Illustration by Eddie Irizarry using Stellarium.

Star chart with North Star Polaris and Big Dipper and comet location.

Location of Comet C/2019 Y4 (ATLAS) during late March 2020. Facing north-northeast at around 9 p.m. local daylight time (8 p.m. if you're not using daylight time) for all locations. In late March, the comet requires a small or medium-sized telescope, but it may be visible in binoculars very soon! Illustration by Eddie Irizarry using Stellarium.

Star chart with Big Dipper, North Star Polaris, and location of comet.

Location of Comet C/2019 Y4 (ATLAS) during early April 2020. Facing north at around 9 p.m. local daylight time (around 8 p.m. if you're not in daylight time). Illustration by Eddie Irizarry using Stellarium.

Star chart with Big Dipper, Venus, and Capella and location of comet.

Location of Comet C/2019 Y4 (ATLAS) on April 15, 2020, around 9 p.m. local daylight time (around 8 p.m. if you're not in daylight time). Illustration by Eddie Irizarry using Stellarium.

Star chart with Venus and Capella and location of comet.

Location of Comet C/2019 Y4 (ATLAS) on April 30, 2020, around 9:30 p.m. local daylight time (around 8:30 p.m. if you're not in daylight time). Illustration by Eddie Irizarry using Stellarium.

Star chart with horizon, Venus, and Capella with location of comet.

By May 15, 2020, Comet C/2019 Y4 (ATLAS) will become increasingly closer to the Northwest horizon. By then it might be bright enough to be easily seen with small binoculars, or perhaps even with the unaided eye! Illustration by Eddie Irizarry using Stellarium.

Bottom line: Recently discovered Comet C/2019 Y4 (ATLAS) isn't bright enough to see with the unaided eye ... yet. But it's getting brighter. Will it provide a good show or fizzle out?

Sharing is caring!