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Israel virus death 204 with 15,555 cases, MK decided to restart education system  
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04.27.20

Israel's coronavirus death toll up to 204, with 15,555 confirmed cases

As number of recoveries continues to outpace number of new infections, Health Ministry planning to close specialized coronavirus wards as country also prepares for limited reopening of malls in center of country

Ynet| Published: 04.27.20 , 23:15

Coronavirus has claimed 204 lives in Israel so far and 126 people are currently seriously ill with COVID-19, the Health Ministry said Monday night.

There are 15,555 confirmed cases of the virus in Israel and 96 patients are presently on a ventilator.

There have been 112 new cases in the past 24 hours while 469 people have recovered from the disease. In all, 7,200 people have recovered from the disease in Israel. A total of 362 people are currently being treated in hospitals for COVID-19, 5,190 are being treated at home and 1,756 are in specially designated hotels. Another 843 people are waiting to be informed whether they require hospitalization. Although the number of coronavirus patients continues to rise, it seems the rate of infections is decreasing steadily - prompting the Health Ministry to mull the closure of specialized coronavirus wards across the country.

Israel has been slowly but steadily lifting restrictions imposed to curb the spread of coronavirus as the number of recoveries continues to outpace the number of new infections.

On Sunday, the Health Ministry presented its outline for the return to normal operations in hospitals.

According to the guidelines, staff will work in permanent shifts, clinics belonging to HMOs will reopen for elective surgeries.

The government also decided Monday to partially restart the education system from Sunday, after a month and a half of forced enclosures due to the pandemic.

Furthermore, in line with recommendations from the Ministry of Intelligence Services, Israel is on track to reopen its malls under certain restrictions.

A ministry study predicts just a 1.5-5% rise in infections from mall reopenings, with new cases unlikely to cause serious illness as most visitors are unlikely to belong to a high-risk group.

The report was drafted in preparation for a hearing Monday at the National Economic Council regarding the opening of malls in the next round of steps to ease regulations, which is expected to take place on May 3.

04.27.20 – Mo - - -

## Reopening malls under certain restrictions temperature tests, gloves & masks

04.27.20

Reopening malls unlikely to trigger mass contagion, study says

Report by Ministry of Intelligence Services predicts that lifting some regulations on shopping centers will lead to 1.5-5% rise in coronavirus infections; restrictions on Tel Aviv-area malls look set to be eased on May 3

Itamar Eichner | Published: 04.27.20 , 22:06

Reopening malls in the Tel Aviv area is not likely to cause a major coronavirus contagion, according to a report by the Ministry of Intelligence Services requested by the National Economic Council and the Ministry of Economy.

The report was drafted in preparation for a hearing Monday at the National Economic Council regarding the opening of malls in the next round of steps to ease regulations, which is expected to take place on May 3.

Israel will reopen malls under certain restrictions - only retail stores will be allowed to open and restaurants and places of entertainment will remain closed.

The document - "Exit strategy in the retail market - implications of opening shopping malls" - analyzed different scenarios caused by opening malls in central Israel, based on the assumption that the repercussions felt in the heavily populated Tel Aviv region could then be applied to other areas of Israel.

The document was forwarded to the National Economic Council, headed by Prof. Avi Simhon, the economic adviser of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The study predicts a 1.5-5% rise in infections caused by opening the malls and states that the majority of those new infections would be unlikely to cause serious illness as most visitors would not be in a high-risk group.

The report concludes that a relatively widespread opening of malls would not lead to a significant increase in the rate of infection, but states that malls in areas suffering high mortality rates should remain closed.

In a cabinet meeting Saturday, Economy Minister Eli Cohen said detailed guidelines were required in order to reopen the malls.

"I estimate that if there is no deterioration in morbidity rates, malls can be reopened," said Cohen.

"With malls it is easier because there are defined entrances and exits," he said.

"We can do temperature tests, require visitors to wear gloves and masks and use an app to monitor customers to know if a sick or a quarantined person visited the area," Cohen said.

Israel has been slowly but steadily lifting restrictions imposed to curb the spread of coronavirus as the number of recoveries continues to outpace the number of new infections.

As of Monday evening, the virus had claimed 204 lives in Israel, with 15,555 confirmed cases.

04.27.20 – Mo - - -

## Secret coalition negotiations force Knesset debate on PM rotation deal

04.27.20

### Female MK dragged from Knesset debate on changing Basic Law

Controversial legislation to facilitate coalition deal sparks vociferous opposition from left, which peaks as Meretz's Tamar Zandberg is forcibly removed, while ex-Gantz ally Lapid offers to help PM retain power

Nina Fuchs | Published: 04.27.20 , 17:16

Meretz MK Tamar Zandberg on Monday was forcibly dragged out of a Knesset hearing by ushers in protective face masks after she was ordered to leave the chamber due to repeated interruptions.

The incident took place as the Knesset special committee convened to debate legislation that will change one of the country's Basic Laws to facilitate the terms of the coalition agreement between Blue & White and Likud.

The controversial legislation sparked vociferous opposition from left-wing lawmakers, which peaked as the committee chairman, Blue & White MK Eitan Ginsburg, ordered Zandberg removed from the hall.

Zandberg refused to leave calmly as she was approached by three ushers in protective face masks. After repeated requests, she was forcibly removed from the chamber. Blue & White MK Pnina Tamano-Shata, who defected from Yesh Atid to Gantz' party after he struck the coalition deal with Netanyahu, was also removed from the discussion after hurling insults at her former colleagues in Yesh Atid.

The hearing opened on a stormy note as Yesh Atid Chairman Yair Lapid, who pulled his party of the political alliance he had with Blue & White chief Benny Gantz when he discovered his secret coalition negotiations with Likud, attacked both Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former Blue & White associates.

Lapid, who with Gantz had been joint leader of Blue & White, also expressed doubts that Netanyahu would honor the rotation deal and said he was willing to help the prime minister cancel the agreement if asked.

"Any moment Netanyahu doesn't want to do the rotation, all he has to do is come to me and say, 'I want those [Basic] Laws back to their original wording.' We will say 'yes,'" Lapid said.

Lapid pointed out that with the support of the breakaway Blue & White factions - Moshe Ya'alon's Telem and his own party - Netanyahu's right-wing bloc would have 75 votes. Under the terms of the coalition agreement, Israel will effectively have the simultaneous tenure of two prime ministers - Likud leader Netanyahu and Gantz.

The title of prime minister will be held by Netanyahu for 18 months with Gantz as acting prime minister and defense minister. Gantz will take over as prime minister in October 2021, but each will have the right to veto government decisions during the other's tenure as premier.

Time is running out for setting the legislative framework for the rotation in place, as the Knesset's mandate to name the head of the next government expires on May 6.

04.27.20 – Mo - - -

Litzman & rabbi rift over consent to impose lockdown on the ultra-Orthodox

04.27.20

Litzman's personal rabbi ordered him to quit Health Ministry

Sources close to the current Rebbe of the Hasidic dynasty of Gur say that Litzman's 'anti-Haredi' conduct during the coronavirus epidemic, especially the lockdown of Bnei Brak, are the reasons behind the rift between the two

Kobi Nachshoni, Moran Azulay | Published: 04.27.20 , 13:26

Though Yaakov Litzman announced Sunday he's wanting to retire from the Health Ministry in favor of the housing portfolio, many attribute his decision to a row with the current Rebbe of the Hasidic dynasty of Gur, his personal rabbi, regarding his actions during the coronavirus epidemic.

Litzman on Sunday claimed his sudden decision to leave the ministry he has headed for more than a decade, is down to feeling that he has done all he could for the health system during his tenure.

Behind the scenes, however, it seems the main reason for his retirement is the Rebbe of Gur, Rabbi Yaakov Arye, who apparently has grown tired of the way Litzman has failed the Haredi community over his years in charge of the ministry.

Sources within the Rebbe's inner circle said that he ordered Litzman to leave his post, a decision that very much surprised him.

According to the sources, the main reason behind Rebbe's decision is the health minister's conduct during the coronavirus epidemic, which he deemed as being anti-Haredi, due to Litzman's consent to impose lockdown on the ultra-Orthodox city of Bnei Brak and parts of Jerusalem.

Channel 12 reporter Yair Sherki reported Sunday that an interview with Yedioth Ahronoth's journalist Sarit Rosenblum in March was the last straw that made Arye call on Litzman to quit his post.

In the interview, Litzman personally called for a lockdown of Bnei Brak, due to the high rate of COVID-19 infection in the ultra-Orthodox city.

The cabinet approved Litzman's proposal, which caused unrest within Israel's ultra-Orthodox community.

Litzman is now slated to receive **the housing and construction portfolio**, but according to sources, there are some within his own party who are trying to undermine these efforts and leave the former health minister out of government altogether.

According to the sources, Degel HaTorah, which is part of Litzman's United Torah Judaism, demanded that their leader MK Moshe Gafni receives the housing portfolio in accordance with a deal signed among members of the political-religious alliance. Gafni for his part apparently prefers to remain the head of the Knesset's Finance Committee, but due to the **severe housing shortage the country's ultra-Orthodox community** suffers from, immense pressure is being put on him to accept the post.

Blue & White for their part has begun internal talks to see if they could snag the health portfolio, which at this time is slated for Yamina leader and current Defense Minister Naftali Bennett.

The center-left offered to exchange several minor ministries for the health portfolio, although Likud is aiming to receive the foreign affairs ministry. **As of now, no deal was struck between the two parties.**

**04.26.20** – Su - - -

**Egyptian TV show drama predicting US & Israel destruction in 2120**

**04.26.20**

**Israel slams Egyptian TV show predicting its destruction**

Jerusalem calls series set in 2120 'completely unacceptable especially because the two states have had a peace treaty for the past 41 years'; writer says scenario 'is a possible future in the absence of real peace and true stability in the region'

Associated Press| Published: **04.26.20**, 23:43

Israel on Sunday condemned a new **Egyptian TV drama set in the year 2120** that **predicts** the country's **destruction** as well as the **breakup of the United States**.

A statement from the Foreign Ministry said the series "is completely unacceptable especially because the two states have had a peace treaty for the past 41 years."

Egypt and Israel have worked closely on security issues since the 1979 treaty, especially near their shared border in the Sinai Peninsula, in a shared effort against Islamic militants. However, public opinion in Egypt has remained largely against normalized relations with Israel.

The **Egyptian series** "El-Nehaya" - Arabic for "**The End**" - is about a computer engineer living in a dystopian future dominated by cyborg clones. It's one of the many dramas and **soap operas that air each night during** the Muslim holy **month of Ramadan**, which began last week.

In the first episode, a teacher tells a class of students about "the war to liberate Jerusalem," which he says occurred less than 100 years after Israel's founding in 1948. The teacher says Jews in Israel "ran away and returned to their countries of origin" in Europe.

He made no mention of what happened to Jews in Israel whose families came from other Middle Eastern countries - roughly half the Jewish population.

A holographic map of a divided U.S. is also shown, with the teacher saying that "America was the central supporter of the Zionist state."

There was no immediate comment from the Egyptian government.

The series is produced by Synergy, one of Egypt's largest production companies, which has strong links with the government of President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi. The series airs on the ON television network, which is owned by a pro-government company.

The show's writer, Amr Samir Atif, told The Associated Press that the destruction of Israel "is a possible future in the absence of real peace and true stability in the region. (...) Peace should be based on justice."

In recent years, Israeli officials have publicly praised security cooperation with Sissi's government.

Israel has granted Egypt permission to deploy troops, armor and helicopter gunships close to the Israeli border to fight militants there.

The 1979 peace treaty limited the number of troops and type of weapons Egypt can have in the area without Israeli consent.

When Sissi was asked in a 2018 interview if Egypt's cooperation with Israel was the closest ever, he replied: "That is correct. (...) We have a wide range of cooperation with the Israelis."

Since taking office in 2014, Sissi has met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at least twice.

04.26.20 – Su - - -

Israel's population 9.2 million near Independence Day, 74% Jews, 21% Arabs

04.26.20

Israel's population now at 9.2 million as Independence Day nears

Central Bureau of Statistics' annual report shows the country's population grew by 171,000 people over the past year, and is expected to pass 15 million when Israel turns 100 in 2048; 74% are Jews, 21% Arabs

Yaron Druckman | Published: 04.26.20 , 15:03

Israel's population has reached 9.2 million, the Central Bureau of Statistics said Sunday in its annual report published ahead of Independence Day.

According to the report, Israel's population has grown by 171,000 people since Independence Day last year and is expected to reach 11.1 million in 2030. By 2048, when Israel turns 100, the CBS forecasts a population of 15.2 million.

Some 74% of the population are Jews, 6.8 million, while 21% of the population are Arabs, approximately 1.93 million.

Another 454,000 people are non-Arab Christians, from minority religions and people listed as non-religious in the census. They account for the remaining 5%.

This number does not include some 164,000 foreign workers living in Israel.

Among the Jewish population, 78% are native-born, while 3.3 million people have immigrated to the country. Some 32,000 new migrants arrived in Israel over the past 2 years.

Since last year, 180,000 babies have been born, and 44,000 people passed away.

According to the data, 36.1% of Israel's population are below the age of 19, 31.6% are between the ages of 20-49 and 25.1% are over the age of 50, with 0.6% over the age of 90.

04.23.20 – Th - - -

EU chief does not recognize Israel sovereignty in the West Bank annex

04.23.20

EU warns incoming Israeli gov't against West Bank annexation

EU foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell said the 27-member bloc does not recognize Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank and that the EU will continue to monitor the situation  
Associated Press| Published: 04.23.20 , 21:15

The European Union on Thursday issued a warning against the incoming Israeli government's intention to annex parts of the West Bank, saying that such a move "would constitute a serious violation of international law."

The EU's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, said the 27-member bloc does not recognize Israeli sovereignty over the territory and that it will "continue to closely monitor the situation and its broader implications, and will act accordingly."

Earlier this week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his main rival Benny Gantz signed a coalition agreement that includes a clause to advance plans to annex parts of the West Bank, including Israeli settlements, starting on July 1.

Netanyahu's pro-settler base is eager to move forward with annexation while the friendly administration of President Donald Trump is in office.

The White House's long-awaited Mideast plan, unveiled earlier this year, envisions leaving parts of the West Bank under permanent Israeli control. The Palestinians have rejected the plan as biased.



Israel captured the West Bank during the 1967 Six-Day War. Since then, more than 700,000 Israelis have moved into settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Most of the international community considers Israel's West Bank settlements illegal according to international law and an obstacle to a two-state solution to the conflict.

The Palestinians seek all of the West Bank and East Jerusalem as part of an independent state. Annexation of West Bank settlements would infuriate the Palestinians and Israel's Arab neighbors, and eliminate any lingering hopes of establishing a viable Palestinian state.

The Netanyahu-Gantz deal stipulates that any Israeli action would need U.S. backing, and must take into account Israel's peace treaties with neighboring Jordan and Egypt.

Israel's Foreign Ministry responded to the EU with a statement deploring that Borrell "opts to see the relations between Israel and the European Union" solely through the "status of the territories."

04.27.20 – Mo - - -

Some countries & US states move to ease virus lockdowns by May or June

04.27.20

Some countries, U.S. states move to ease virus lockdowns

While many world leaders say reopening of businesses and allowing people out is 'light at the end of the tunnel' as infections and deaths decline, many still worry that premature easing of measures will bring a 'second global wave' of COVID-19

Associated Press | Published: 04.27.20, 12:41

Some countries and U.S. states are starting to ease coronavirus lockdown restrictions and focus on fixing their battered economies.

In Spain, the streets echoed again with joyful cries on Sunday as the nation let children go outside for the first time in six weeks. Many European countries are reopening factories and construction sites. In New Zealand, people will be able to buy takeout restaurant food again starting midnight Monday.

But some worry that prematurely lifting measures that were imposed to halt the spread of the coronavirus could spark a resurgence in infections.

In the U.S., governors in states including hard-hit New York and Michigan are keeping stay-at-home restrictions in place until at least mid-May, while their counterparts in places such as Georgia, Oklahoma and Alaska are allowing certain businesses to reopen. White House strategists are planning to shift President Donald Trump's public focus from the pandemic toward fixing the economy. This comes after he was sharply criticized in recent days for publicly musing that scientists should explore injecting toxic disinfectants as a potential virus cure.

In China, state-run media said that hospitals in Wuhan, the original epicenter of the pandemic, no longer have any COVID-19 patients. And in Japan, the central bank eased monetary policy, prompting a surge in the stock market.

The official death toll from the virus topped 205,000 worldwide, with nearly 3 million confirmed infections, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University, though the real figures are believed to be much higher, in part because of inadequate testing and differences in counting the dead.

Italy, Britain, Spain and France accounted for more than 20,000 deaths each. In the U.S., the death toll was nearly 55,000 — close to the 58,000 U.S. troops who were killed during the Vietnam War.

Some encouraging signs were seen, as Italy recorded its lowest 24-hour number of deaths since mid-March, with 260. New York state registered its fewest since late last month, with 367.

Seven weeks into Italy's strict lockdown, Premier Giuseppe Conte laid out a long-awaited timetable for getting back to normal, announcing that factories, construction sites and wholesale supply businesses can resume activity as soon as they put safety measures in place against the virus.

Conte also said that starting May 4, parks and gardens will reopen, funerals will be allowed, athletes can resume training, and people will be able to visit relatives living in the same region. If all goes well, stores and museums will reopen May 18, and restaurants, cafes and salons on June 1, he said.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez will present a detailed plan Tuesday for the “de-escalation” of Spain's lockdown, but said it would be cautious. His French counterpart will do the same on Tuesday.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson planned to be back at his desk Monday at 10 Downing St. after a bout with the virus put him in intensive care. He faces calls for more clarity on when his government will ease the lockdown, now set to run until at least May 7.

Other European nations are further along in relaxing their restrictions. Germany allowed nonessential shops and other facilities to open last week, and Denmark has reopened schools for children up to fifth grade.

In the U.S., the split in approaches to reopening states has often been along partisan lines. Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt, a Republican, told “Fox News Sunday” that with hospitalizations dropping in his state, he will reopen churches and restaurant dining on Friday, with social-distancing guidelines in place.

“We believe it's the time to have a measured reopening,” he said.

But Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, a Democrat, told ABC that her state is not ready and needs more robust testing, community tracing and a plan for isolating people who get sick.

“We've got to be nimble and we have to follow the science and be really smart about how we reengage,” she said.

In a sign that it could get harder to enforce restrictions as the weather improves, a lingering heat wave in California lured people to beaches, rivers and trails Sunday, prompting warnings that defiance of stay-at-home orders could reverse progress.

04.26.20 – Su - - -

North Korean leader missed April 15 commemoration, prompting many to speculate

04.26.20

Satellite imagery finds Kim Jong Un's train near country's 'elite area'

Pyongyang, Seoul say there are no signs that could indicate health problems for North Korean leader, who missed April 15 commemoration of 108th birthday of his grandfather, prompting many to speculate he's sick

Associated Press | Published: 04.26.20, 08:37

A train likely belonging to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has been parked at his compound on the country's east coast since last week, satellite imagery showed, amid speculation about his health that has been caused, in part, by a long period out of the public eye.

Kim Jong Un's train has been parked at the Leadership Railway Station servicing his Wonsan compound since at least April 21, the website 38 North said Saturday, citing an analysis of recent satellite photos of the area. The website said that the approximately 250-meter (820-foot) -long train wasn't present on April 15 but was present on both April 21 and 23.

The satellite photos released by 38 North, a website specializing in North Korea studies, don't say anything about Kim's potential health problems, and they echo South Korean government intelligence that Kim is staying outside of the capital, Pyongyang. Seoul has also repeatedly indicated that there have been no unusual signs that could indicate health problems for Kim.

That hasn't stopped growing unconfirmed rumors and media reports about Kim's health that have emerged since he missed an April 15 commemoration of the 108th birthday of his grandfather, North Korea founder Kim Il Sung.

Kim Jong Un is the third generation of his family to rule North Korea, and he hadn't missed the April 15 event, one of the year's most important for the North, since assuming power after his father Kim Jong Il's death in late 2011.

Kim's health is of crucial importance because of worries that the serious illness or death of a leader venerated with near godlike passion by millions of North Koreans could cause instability in the impoverished, nuclear-armed country.

Many experts in South Korea downplayed speculation that Kim is seriously ill. They also said North Korea won't likely face a serious immediate turmoil even if Kim is

incapacitated or dies because someone else like his influential sister Kim Yoo Jong will quickly step in, though the prospect for the North's long-term political future would be unclear.

"The train's presence does not prove the whereabouts of the North Korean leader or indicate anything about his health, but it does lend weight to reports that Kim is staying at an elite area on the country's eastern coast," it said.

The photos indicate the train arrived before April 21 and was still present on April 23, when it appeared to be repositioned for departure. However, there was no indication when that departure might take place, 38 North said.

North Korea exerts extremely tight control on information about its leadership, making it virtually impossible for outsiders to find out what's going on at those senior levels. Even South Korea's main spy agency has a mixed record on confirming developments in North Korea. When Kim Jong Il died in December 2011, for instance, few outsiders knew it until it was reported by North Korea's state media two days later.

A U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to talk to the media, said the latest rumors about Kim's health had not changed the U.S. assessment of the information as "speculation."

Danny Russel, a former National Security Council director and assistant secretary of state for Asia who has dealt with North Korea in the past, cautioned that rumors have abounded for years about Kim, his father, Kim Jong Il, and his grandfather, Kim Il Sung, and most turned out to have been false.

"While serving in government I was on the receiving end of multiple intelligence reports about alleged accidents, illnesses and assassination attempts against North Korean leaders — only to have them reappear in public," he said.

South Korea's presidential office said last week that Kim appeared to be handling state affairs normally and that there had been no suspicious activities, such as an emergency readiness order issued by the North's military or the ruling Workers' Party. The South Korean government has since maintained its assessment that Kim's health remains the same. Some South Korean media outlets, citing unidentified government officials, have reported that Kim was staying at Wonsan.

North Korea's state media still remain silent about the outside speculation on Kim's health. On Saturday, the official Korean Central News Agency reported that Kim had received a message of greeting from the chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation on the occasion of the first anniversary of Kim's summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The message wished Kim "good health and happiness," KCNA said.

It's not the first time that Kim has vanished from the public eye, and past absences in state media dispatches have also triggered speculation about his health. In 2014, state media didn't report any public activities for Kim for about six weeks, before he reappeared with a cane. South Korea's spy agency said later that he had a cyst removed from his ankle.

04.23.20 – Th - - -

2 New York cats become first U.S. pets to test positive for coronavirus

04.23.20

2 New York cats become first U.S. pets to test positive for coronavirus

The felines, from separate areas of New York state, had mild respiratory illness and are expected to make a full recovery; they believed to have contracted COVID-19 from people in their households

Reuters| Published: 04.23.20 , 09:49

Two cats have become the first pet animals in the United States to test positive for COVID-19, caused by the new coronavirus, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The cats, from separate areas of New York state, had mild respiratory illness and are expected to make a full recovery. It is believed that they contracted the virus from people in their households or neighborhoods, according to the CDC.

The CDC said there is no evidence that pets play a role in spreading the virus in the United States and is not recommending routine testing of animals at this juncture. The agency recommends that people do not let pets interact with people or other animals outside the household, cats should be kept indoors, and dogs should be walked on a leash, maintaining at least six feet from other animals and people.

Earlier this month, a study suggested that cats can become infected with the new coronavirus but dogs appear not to be vulnerable, prompting the WHO to say it will take a closer look at transmission of the virus between humans and pets.

04.22.20 – We - - -

Lebanon Palestine refugee camp on lockdown, overcrowded limits isolation

04.22.20

First virus case puts Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camp on lockdown

UN agency says medical workers to be dispatched to Wavel camp in the eastern Bekaa Valley to conduct COVID-19 tests after a Palestinian woman becomes infected

AFP| Published: 04.22.20 , 13:45

A Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon has been put on lockdown after the UN announced the first confirmed case of coronavirus in one of the country's numerous and crowded camps.

The patient, a **Palestinian refugee from Syria**, has been taken to the state-run Rafic Hariri hospital in Beirut, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said in a statement late Tuesday.

Workers disinfect the Wavel camp for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley, on April 22, 2020, after the UN announced the first confirmed case of coronavirus there

Medical experts were due to visit the Wavel camp in the eastern Bekaa Valley later on Wednesday to carry out tests, the agency added.

The **testing will focus on the woman's relatives** and people she has **interacted** with, as well as 50 others chosen arbitrarily "inside the camp and its surroundings," said Lebanon's official National News Agency.

In coordination with Lebanese security forces, Palestinian factions in charge of security have imposed a **lockdown on the camp, preventing anyone from entering or leaving**, the NNA report said.

Members of armed Palestinian factions, in coordination with Lebanese security forces, impose a lockdown on the Wavel camp for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley, on April 22, 2020, after the UN announced the first confirmed case of coronavirus there

The United Nations and aid groups have repeatedly warned that refugees and migrants in crowded camps worldwide are at special risk of the new coronavirus.

More than 70 million people globally been forced by conflict, persecution, violence and abuses to flee their homes, including more than 20 million people living as refugees, according to UN data.

Weak sanitation, cramped conditions

More than 2,000 people live in Wavel, according to statistics released by Lebanon's government after a 2017 census, but the UN agency says the population of those registered in the camp are much higher.

Aid groups have warned that hundreds of thousands of Palestinian and Syrian refugees living in Lebanon's overcrowded camps are the most vulnerable and that self-isolating patients in the camps where sanitation is weak would be one of the top challenges.

"The main concern remains... the spread of coronavirus in the **overcrowded Palestine refugee camps** where there are **very limited possibilities for home isolation**," an UNRWA spokeswoman said earlier this month.

**More than 174,000 Palestinians live in Lebanon**, according to official figures, with most residing in camps ruled by Palestinian factions beyond the reach of Lebanese security forces.

But unofficial estimates say the Palestinians, whose forefathers fled the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, could number as many as 500,000.

And out of the 1.5 million Syrians Lebanon says it hosts since the civil war broke out in the neighboring country nine years ago, nearly one million are registered with the UN as refugees.

So far just one Palestinian, who lives outside a camp, and three Syrians have tested positive in Lebanon for COVID-19 compared to 677 infections and 21 deaths across the country, according to officials.