

Swiss impose emergency measures to combat coronavirus

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The Swiss government imposed emergency measures on Monday in a bid to stem the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, banning all gatherings, tightening borders and deploying the military.

Shops, restaurants, bars and leisure facilities are to shut down until April 19, except for food shops, pharmacies and health facilities.

"A strong reaction is needed across the country. And we need it now," Swiss President Simonetta Sommaruga told a press conference.

Infections in Switzerland jumped on Sunday by nearly 1,000 cases in 24 hours to 2,200 and 14 deaths were recorded from the virus across the wealthy Alpine country.

"In view of the accelerated spread of the coronavirus, the Federal Council is introducing more stringent measures to protect the public," the government said in a statement.

"It has now declared that an 'extraordinary situation' exists in Switzerland," allowing it to impose measures across all the federation's 26 cantons.

The new measures were to be imposed from midnight (2300 GMT Monday).

'Sufficient stocks'

The government tried to reassure the public that food and medicine supplies would not run out.

"Provision of the entire population with foodstuffs, medicinal products and essential everyday items is assured; there are sufficient stocks," the statement said.

The elderly were urged not to go out, while people were instructed to maintain social distancing.

"The Federal Council is also calling on members of the public to avoid all unnecessary contact, to keep their distance from others, and to follow the recommended hygiene measures," said the statement.

"It is calling on the elderly in particular to remain at home."

Landlocked Switzerland will also tighten its border controls with Germany, France and Austria, after already ramping up restrictions at the southern border with hard-hit northern Italy.

Only Swiss citizens, people with a Swiss residency permit and those who cross the border for work will be allowed to enter Switzerland, though transit and goods traffic will continue.

Smaller border posts will be shut, channelling people through the larger crossings.

"These measures are intended to protect the Swiss population and maintain capacities in the Swiss health service," the government said.

Switzerland announced Friday that it would make \$10.5 billion available immediately to help companies and employees to make it through the crisis.

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