

Iraq confirms four more novel coronavirus cases

25 February 2020

Iraq on Tuesday confirmed four new cases of the novel coronavirus in an Iraqi family returning from neighbouring Iran, bringing its total number of diagnosed infections to five.

The health ministry said the four were quarantined in Kirkuk, an oil-rich region north of Baghdad, where the governor said authorities were implementing emergency measures to stymie a larger [outbreak](#).

The latest infections came a day after Iraq confirmed its first COVID-19 case, an Iranian national studying in a Shiite seminary in the shrine city of Najaf in southern Iraq.

Iraq last week banned travel to and from the Islamic Republic, which has recorded 15 deaths from COVID-19, the highest death toll outside China, the epidemic's epicentre.

It closed its land borders with Iran, allowing passage only to returning Iraqis who would be screened, while Iraq's national airline suspended flights to the Islamic Republic.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Iraqi [health ministry](#) announced tightened measures to combat a coronavirus outbreak, urging citizens to refrain from holding celebrations and large gatherings.

It said schools and universities in Najaf would be closed for 10 days and warned against non-essential travel to the region.

It also announced a fresh ban on the entry of non-Iraqis from affected countries Thailand, South Korea, Japan, Italy and Singapore.

Iraq had previously closed its land border with Kuwait and banned the entry of non-Iraqis coming from China.

Concern has spread over [social media](#) in Iraq, with

users expressing fear that the country cannot handle a coronavirus outbreak.

Many hospitals in Iraq are poorly equipped or in disrepair and there are fewer than 10 doctors for every 10,000 people, the World Health Organization says.

Amid the growing alarm, Shiite leader Moqtada Sadr, a populist cleric with a cult-like following, rescinded an earlier call for his supporters to join anti-government rallies on Tuesday.

"For your health and safety, I forbid" you to protest, he wrote on Twitter.

The novel coronavirus has spread to more than 25 countries since it emerged in December and is causing mounting alarm due to new outbreaks in Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

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