

With 39 Coronavirus Cases, Israel May Expand Quarantine to All Countries

Decision expected on Monday ■ Netanyahu, Pence hold talks ■ Israel considers West Bank closure ■ 19 cases confirmed in Bethlehem ■ Israel expands quarantine order to Egypt arrivals



Israelis with masks at Ben-Gurion International Airport, March 5, 2020 – Credit Tomer Applebaum

As the novel coronavirus continues to rattle the world, Israel and the Palestinian Authority are grappling with containing the outbreak.

Netanyahu aides clash with medical officials over quarantine of U.S. arrivals

■ 39 Israelis have so far tested positive for coronavirus, known as COVID-19; thousands have been placed in isolation; Israeli man from East Jerusalem's condition worsens

■ All travelers returning to Israel from Germany, Spain, France, Switzerland, and Austria are ordered to go into a 14-day quarantine, effective immediately as Israel mulls extending confinement to some U.S. flights

■ Palestinian Authority bars all foreign tourists for two weeks, closes Bethlehem churches and mosques with 19 confirmed cases of virus. Thirteen U.S. nationals quarantined in Bethlehem hotel

LIVE UPDATES:

Monday

6:50 A.M. Holocaust commemoration March of the Living canceled in Poland

The March of the Living, which commemorates the victims of the Holocaust, bringing thousands to the site of the Auschwitz extermination camp in Poland, and Israel the day after, has canceled the annual event, which has taken place every year since 1988.

Dr. Shmuel Rosenman, who chairs the body organizing the event, said the event had been postponed after consulting with health officials. "Our primary concern is the health of the many participants and the Holocaust survivors who would be joining them. Given that this is an international event involving 110 delegations from around the world, we have a responsibility to take precautionary measures in accordance with the guidelines given by authorities in various countries," he said in a statement.

The event was slated to take place on April 21. (*Haaretz*)

3:05 A.M. Two U.S. lawmakers, including Republican Ted Cruz, enter self-quarantine

Texas Senator Ted Cruz and Congressman Paul Gosar from Arizona announced they were going into self-quarantine on Sunday after they interacted with a person who tested positive for the novel coronavirus.

They reported having had close contact with a person known to be infected with COVID-19 at CPAC, an annual gathering of conservative activists and politicians which President Donald Trump and Vice-President Mike Pence also attended.

Former presidential hopeful Ted Cruz said the chances of infection were "extremely low" but he had entered quarantine out of an "abundance of caution."

This brings the virus one step closer to Trump, as U.S. news outlet Washington Post reported on Monday he had shaken hands with the head of CPAC, who had himself been in contact with the infected man. The White House said the president had not shown any symptoms. (*Agencies*)

2:58 A.M. Saudi Arabia discovers four new coronavirus cases

SUNDAY

11:36 P.M. Visitors to Bethlehem in past two weeks ordered to self-quarantine

The Health Ministry says that anyone in Israel who visited the Bethlehem area in the past two weeks must put themselves into self-quarantine. *(Ido Efrati)*

10:23 P.M. East Jerusalem Parents' Association wants schools closed

The East Jerusalem Parents' Association called on parents to keep children at home to reduce the risk of them contracting the virus. *(Nir Hasson)*

10:12 P.M. Ten more Israelis test positive; total now at 39

The Health Ministry has announced that another ten patients have been diagnosed with coronavirus, bringing the total of infected Israelis to 39. Five of these were diagnosed today after returning from abroad, having returned from countries with cases of the virus: Italy, Spain, Belgium, and Austria. *(Ido Efrati)*

9:30 P.M. 29th Israeli tests positive for coronavirus

A man in his forties from Central Israel became the 29th Israeli to test positive for the virus. The Health Ministry says they have yet to identify where he contracted the virus from. *(Ido Efrati)*

8:49 P.M. Foreigners coming from Egypt will not be allowed into Israel

Interior Minister Aryeh Deri announced that anyone who has been in Egypt in the past two weeks and is not an Israeli citizen or resident will be prevented from entering Israel. The ban will take effect immediately, he said. *(Ido Efrati)*

8:43 P.M. U.S. church group in West Bank tests negative for coronavirus

Thirteen Americans quarantined in a West Bank hotel on suspicion of having caught the coronavirus have tested negative, a Palestinian official said on Sunday.

"The American tourists will leave either later this evening or tomorrow morning," said Ibrahim Melhem, a spokesman for the Palestinian government.

The group, from the 3Circle Church in Fairhope, Alabama, were placed in quarantine at the Angel Hotel in Beit Jala, which is next to Bethlehem, on Wednesday. *(Reuters)*

>> Read the full story here

8:38 P.M. 28th Israeli tests positive for virus

The Health Ministry said that a 60-year-old man from Jerusalem has been confirmed as the 28th case of coronavirus in Israel. The man, who was in contact with a tourist from France, is currently in home quarantine. (*Ido Efrati*)

8:29 P.M. Israeli is 27th virus carrier identified

A resident of Israel's north has been identified as Israel's 27th carrier of the coronavirus. The individual returned from Austria today and entered quarantine, the Health Ministry said. (*Ido Efrati*)

8:19 P.M. 26th Israeli virus carrier identified

A resident of the Haifa area has tested positive for the coronavirus, bringing the total number of confirmed cases in Israel to 26. The woman returned to Israel on a flight from Madrid, Spain.

The Health Ministry said that she has been in quarantine since March 3 and is in a good condition. (*Ido Efrati*)

7:25 P.M. Netanyahu says considering to expand quarantine to all countries

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said any decision to expand quarantine regulations would only be made on Monday. Speaking at a press conference, he said "The measures we took so far have proven themselves... If we decide to expand (quarantine regulations) any further, it would apply to all destinations."

Netanyahu made no specific mention of the reports on the planned quarantine order to some U.S. arrivals, but thanked President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence "for their cooperation."

6:48 P.M. German tourist dies of virus in Egypt

A 60-year-old German tourist has died in Egypt, becoming its first fatality from the new coronavirus, the health ministry in Cairo announced on Sunday.

The man was taken to hospital with fever after arriving in Hurghada from Luxor on March 6, and was placed in intensive care but refused to be transferred to a designated isolation hospital, the ministry said.

6:26 P.M. Israeli defense minister considers West Bank closure

Israeli Defense Minister Naftali Bennet instructed defense officials to “look into economic effects” of a potential general closure of the West Bank. He gave the advice at a Home Front Command drill preparing coronavirus response, adding he will have a discussion tomorrow with defense officials.

The West Bank is already under closure for the Jewish holiday of Purim that began Sunday and is planned to last through Wednesday. The closure of the West Bank and Gaza crossings over Purim occurs on a yearly basis. *(Yaniv Kubovich)*

5:25 P.M. Tel Aviv stock shares plunge amid coronavirus fears

Shares on the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange tumbled in heavy trading amid growing fears of the coronavirus’ toll on the world and Israeli economies. Delek Group led a sharp drop in energy stocks, plunging 31% by close.

Travel and tourism stocks also plummeted with airlines suspending flights for lack of travelers. El Al Airlines lost another 5.7% to 68 agorot after it warned that its decline in revenue for January-April would be \$140 million to \$160 million. *(Shelly Appelberg and TheMarker)*

5:10 P.M. Israel expands quarantine order to Egypt arrivals

Israel’s Health Ministry has decided to expand quarantine regulation to Egypt arrivals. Any Israelis returning from Egypt are now ordered to remain in isolation at home for 14 days. *(Ido Efrati)*

4:30 P.M. Israel’s public security minister considers declaring national emergency

Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan announced Sunday that he is considering declaring a “national emergency” that would give the police additional power, including closing off certain areas and would allow them to enforce directives, in light of the continued spread of the coronavirus. *(Josh Breiner)*

4:30 P.M. Netanyahu, Pence discuss possible quarantine of U.S. arrivals

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. Vice President Mike Pence discussed in a Sunday phonecall a potential quarantine order of some U.S.

arrivals in Israel, as well as other measures to contain the COVID-19 outbreak.

According to a statement released by Netanyahu's office, follow-up talks would be held the coming hours between Israeli and U.S. teams dealing with the crisis, attended by the coronavirus treatment coordinator at the White House, Dr. Debra Birks. *(Noa Landau)*

3:30 P.M. Ben-Gurion Airport to close terminal 1 for international flights

The Airports Authority spokesman announced Sunday that international flights taking off from Ben-Gurion Airport will be moved from Terminal 1 to Terminal 3.

Terminal 1 will be closed for international flights from Saturday, March 14 until the end of April. *(Bar Peleg)*

2:44 P.M. East Jerusalem man in critical condition

Israel's healthcare system is preparing for the first case of a coronavirus fatality in the country, as a 38-year-old man from East Jerusalem is in critical condition, breathing on a respirator and in a medically induced coma.

His possible death will put Israel in a different place in the crisis.

Contrary to most cases in the country whose condition was not serious, a fatality, especially of a relatively young person, will be tangible evidence of the medical community's difficulty in dealing with the virus, even with an advanced medical care system.

Thus it is believed that a first coronavirus-related death in Israel, and those that may follow, would have a dramatic effect on the level of public panic and the broader implications for the economy.

It is also expected to lead to stricter guidelines regarding isolation, reducing contact and gatherings. *(Ido Efrati)*

2:25 P.M. Israel vs. U.S.: Coronavirus shows importance of public health care system | Analysis

If anyone needed additional proof that a public system is the best way to deliver health care to Israelis, they could find it in the global spread of the novel coronavirus. The contrast between the dysfunction of the American health system

and the relatively rapid response of Israel's public system is striking.

The United States, which has many of the world's best epidemiologists and physicians, was unable to identify, prevent and halt the epidemic. It only woke up after communities were infected by people they cannot trace. (*Ronny Linder*)

>> *Read full analysis here*

12:55 P.M. Netanyahu aides clash with medical officials over quarantine of U.S. arrivals

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's associates are pressuring the Health Ministry to walk back from its intention to order a self-imposed quarantine on Israelis returning from New York, California and Washington State, fearing it may hurt relations with the United States and President Donald Trump, according to sources from the ministry.

In recent days, medical sources close to ministry officials criticized the political echelon's involvement in the response to the virus, particularly the prime minister's. According to the sources, the involvement pertains both to the content of the ministry's orders and the timing of their publication.

Professionals within the ministry also sought to order home quarantine for people returning from the AIPAC convention in Washington D.C., after it came to light that three of its attendants were diagnosed with the virus. However, following pressure from Netanyahu's surroundings, the directive scrapped, leaving hundreds of Israelis who were at the convention out of confinement.

Officials have also raised question marks regarding the decision not to quarantine Israelis returning from Belgium, which has seen a spike in diagnosed cases of the virus similar to other countries that Israel does apply the quarantine directive to.

The same officials wondered about the level of influence that the Gur Hassidic sect in Antwerp has had on the decision, as it counts Health Minister Yaakov Litzman amongst its members.

The Prime Minister's Office said in response that "The decisions are made solely on a professional basis." (*Ido Efrati and Noa Landau*)

12:20 P.M. Birthright stop all trips to Israel over COVID-19 outbreak

In wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, Taglit-Birthright is canceling all its upcoming trips to Israel that are still scheduled for the winter season. This is the first time in its 20-year history that the organization, which provides free 10-day trips to Israel for young Jewish adults, has terminated trips.

According to a spokesperson for Birthright, the cancellations will affect 500 participants who had signed up for trips from the United States, Germany, and the former Soviet bloc countries. Birthright's winter season runs from the start of December until late March. *(Judy Maltz)*

11:38 A.M. Thirteen U.S. nationals quarantined in Bethlehem hotel

Thirteen Americans suspected of being exposed to coronavirus during a trip to the Holy Land are in quarantine near Bethlehem and are coordinating with U.S. and Palestinian authorities to try to get home. *(Reuters)*

10:45 A.M. Finance minister calls to allow employees to work from home

Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon called on employers to allow their employees to work from home to minimize the damage to Israel's economy from the coronavirus.

"The Finance Ministry is holding ongoing situation assessments together with the prime minister, the Health Ministry, and the National Security Council, and we'll respond on a case-by-case basis. Israel's economy is strong and stable," Kahlon said. *(TheMarker)*

10:26 A.M. Israeli stock market opens with a 5 percent drop amid coronavirus panic

8:52 A.M. Condition of infected Israeli man from East J'lem worsens

A 38-year-old Israeli man from East Jerusalem who caught the disease and required artificial respiration is currently in harsh condition and suffering from high fever, the Poriya Hospital in Tiberias said in a statement. *(Noa Shpigel)*

2:30 A.M. Third AIPAC Policy Conference attendee diagnosed

A third AIPAC Policy Conference attendee has been diagnosed with the novel coronavirus, a Los Angeles County Department of Public Health statement said

Saturday.

The patient is a Los Angeles resident who recently returned from the pro-Israel lobby's conference in Washington, D.C., the statement said. The department did not mention whether this person contracted the virus at AIPAC, or if they had already caught it before the conference, which took place from last Saturday until Tuesday and drew about 18,000 participants.

>> *Read the full report here*

SATURDAY

10:15 P.M. Two more Israelis diagnosed with coronavirus, bringing total to 25

A woman from central Israel tested positive for Covid-19 after coming in contact with a group of Japanese tourists, becoming the 24th case in Israel. At the same time, an Israeli man from the center also tested positive with the virus after returning from Spain on March 2, becoming the 25th case in the country. (*Ido Efrati*)

10:00 P.M. Saudi Arabia asks people arriving from four countries to self-quarantine

Saudi Arabia has asked people who have traveled to Lebanon, Egypt, Italy or South Korea to self-quarantine for two weeks from the day of their arrival in the Kingdom, Saudi state media quoted the health ministry as saying on Saturday. (*Reuters*)

09:30 P.M. 23rd Israeli diagnosed with coronavirus

An Israeli from the Tel Aviv district just tested positive for the coronavirus after returning from Italy on February 29 and remaining in quarantine since. (*Ido Efrati*)

09:30 P.M. Greece reports 21 new coronavirus cases in a day, bringing the total in to 66 (*Reuters*)

08:30 P.M. 22nd Israeli diagnosed with the virus

A man in his fifties from central Israel, who came back from Barcelona, Spain on

March 1, has just tested positive for the coronavirus after being in quarantine for the past few days. *(Ido Efrati)*

8:30 P.M. Egypt confirms 33 new cases of coronavirus on Nile cruise ship

Egypt confirmed on Saturday 33 new cases of coronavirus on a cruise ship on the River Nile that officials said the previous day had been struck by the virus, the health minister said.

None of the cases were showing symptoms of the illness, Health Minister Hala Zayed told reporters. *(Reuters)*

8:27 P.M. Israel may expand quarantine order to some U.S. arrivals

Health Ministry Director-General Moshe Bar Siman Tov said Israel may expand quarantine regulations to arrivals from some U.S. states, adding he expects a final decision "today or tomorrow."

"We're looking at states in the U.S. where there's higher rates of morbidity," Bar Siman Tov told Israel's Channel 12 News. "These states are Washington, California, and it seems that there's a high rate of infection in New York, too."

He stressed that the Health Ministry's directives on measures to contain the COVID-19 outbreak "are purely professional," saying no political factors affect them. *(Ronny Linder)*

6:50 P.M. Air France to cancel all flights to and from Tel Aviv until March 28

Air France confirms having been advised by Israeli authorities regarding entry into Israeli territory applicable to foreign citizens who visited several countries including France, Germany, Spain, Austria and Switzerland.

5:19 P.M. Three more cases discovered in Bethlehem

The Palestinian Health Ministry in Ramallah said three more Palestinians tested positive for coronavirus, bringing the total number of cases in the West Bank to 19. The three latest patients have been taken to a quarantine facility in Bethlehem.

According to the ministry's statement, lab tests have confirmed they were in

contact with people who were at the Angel Hotel, where several staff members are said to have contracted COVID-19 from Greek tourists. (*Jack Khoury*)

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