Italy confirms first two cases of coronavirus as passengers allowed off cruise

Elisa Menendez
Thursday 30 Jan 2020 10:19 pm

Italy has confirmed its first cases of the deadly coronavirus, shortly after the outbreak was declared a global health emergency.

Italian prime minister, Giuseppe Conte, revealed that two Chinese tourists have tested positive for the virus.

He has since ordered all air traffic to be blocked between Italy and China.

It comes after more than 6,000 passengers and 1,000 crew members were stuck on an Italian cruise ship north of Rome on Thursday, after a Chinese woman, 54, fell ill.
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Medical staff of S. Martino hospital infectious disease department, with protective equipment on the isolation room, Genoa, Italy (Picture: EPA)

Passengers were allowed off the Costa Smeralda after being stuck there for hours (Picture: AFP)
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Officials from the Costa Smeralda ship said the woman and her partner, who had no symptoms,

An Asian tourist wears a protective mask, in part due to the pneumonia outbreak alerts, while visiting the monuments in Rome (Picture: EPA)
Officials from the Costa Smeralda ship said the woman and her partner, who had no symptoms, were put into isolation Wednesday.

Passengers were allowed to disembark on Thursday night after tests came back negative, said Italian coast guard Captain Stefano Varone.

Italy is the fourth European country, after France, Finland and Germany, to have confirmed cases.

It comes after the World Health Organisation declared the virus a global health emergency, after the death toll shot up to 170.

Health experts confirmed there are now 98 cases in 18 countries outside China, while there have been eight involving human-to-human transmission in Germany, Japan, Vietnam and the US.

Thousands were stuck on the cruise north of Rome (Picture: Rex)
Following the announcement, British medical officers increased the risk level in the UK from low to moderate.

In the UK, 161 people have tested negative for the virus as of Thursday.

Around 150 UK citizens are due to be brought back from a flight leaving the epicentre of the outbreak, the Chinese city of Wuhan, at 7am local time on Friday (11pm Thursday UK time).

Passengers on the evacuation flight, which will have military medics on board, will land at RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire on Friday morning.

They will then be taken to an NHS facility on the Wirral for a quarantine period of 14 days.

It is understood they will be taken to a former student accommodation block in the grounds of Arrowe Park Hospital.

Fifty people – mainly from EU countries – will also be on the evacuation flight which will head to Spain afterwards.

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**Wuhan Coronavirus - is there a vaccine and what are the symptoms?**

The novel coronavirus was first detected in the Chinese city of Wuhan, which has a population of 11m people, in December.

It has led to large parts of China being placed under quarantine, with flights and transport being grounded and Lunar New Year celebrations being cancelled as China attempts to prevent others from becoming infected.
Cases have also been reported in other parts of the world including Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, Vietnam, South Korea, Thailand, Canada, the US, France and Germany.

**Is there a vaccine for coronavirus?**

![Vaccine poster]

There is no current cure for the Wuhan Coronavirus, with scientists working on a vaccine (Picture: EPA)

At present there is no vaccine for coronavirus – although several different organisations are working to create one.

Those reported to be working on a potential vaccine include National Institutes of Health as well as other private companies including Inovio, Novavax, Johnson and Johnson and Moderna – the latter working directly with US government health agencies.

Despite all the combined efforts it could still be a while before a vaccine against the current coronavirus is ready.

A spokesman for the Institutes said that it could be a few months before the first clinical trials get underway, and a year or more before it’s available.

Meanwhile Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, who are also reported to be working on a vaccine, have said that if one were developed it would most likely be given to healthcare workers first due to their exposure to patients suffering from coronavirus.

**What are the symptoms of coronavirus?**
The early symptoms of the virus include a dry cough, a fever, shortness of breath and a sore throat.

While many of those affected have shown only mild symptoms, some have gone on to develop fluid in the lungs consistent with viral pneumonia.

The virus is more likely to progress into a severe illness or prove fatal among older patients or those with weakened immune systems.

There is no specific cure for the coronavirus – as it's a viral infection, antibiotics won't help.

The World Health Organisation has suggested avoiding close contact with anyone suffering from an acute respiratory infection and ensuring that coughs and sneezes are covered with disposable tissues or clothing.

They also recommend regular hand-washing as well as avoiding unprotected contact with wild or farm animals.
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