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## **SITUATION REPORT: COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The Covid-19 pandemic that is sweeping the globe today is unprecedented in its scale and the disruption it is causing on all aspects of life around the world. The novel coronavirus, which surfaced in Wuhan, China late last year, has spread to 210 countries and territories, infecting close to 2.5 million and killing more than 170,000 as of today.

Maldives has been preparing for protection, mitigation and management of the crisis from January this year. A National Coronavirus Task Force was constituted by the President and an all-government effort was planned and implemented under the guidance of the Health Protection Agency (HPA) together with the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). The planning was made working closely with the World Health Organization.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> March, under orders of the President, a National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) was established to manage and coordinate the effort. By the last week of January thermal cameras were installed to screen tourists arriving at Velana International Airport and dedicated flu clinics were established.

By 2<sup>nd</sup> February three quarantine facilities were established at islands and unused resort islands and facilities in the vicinity of Male'. Additional facilities have been opened at various resorts that are currently vacant. Resorts were informed of established procedures in case of suspected or positive cases of the virus and an audit was also carried out by the Ministry of Tourism under the instructions of the President to assess the preparedness of the resorts. Testing began on 29<sup>th</sup> February as part of surveillance.

The first case of the virus was detected in the Maldives on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2020 at Kuredu Island Resort, from tests conducted after an Italian tourist who stayed at the resort and left the country reported that he has been infected with the virus. Five cases were identified at the resort.

As of 19<sup>th</sup> March, 13 cases were discovered at tourist establishments which includes Kuredu Island Resort, Kuramathi Island Resort, Sandies Bathala Maldives, Anantara Dhigu and a liveaboard, Island Safari. The cases included nine Italians and one each from Turkey, South Africa, United Kingdom and Germany. While all 13 have recovered, two other Italians' tests came back positive after they departed the country. No further cases were discovered among tourists in the country.

As the pandemic spread across countries the government enforced travel restrictions from various countries that were significantly impacted by the crisis. Arrivals from China was banned on 4<sup>th</sup> February and by the third week of March, arrivals from affected regions of South Korea, Italy, Iran, Bangladesh, affected areas of Germany and France, Spain, Malaysia and United Kingdom was in effect.





- 30 Jan 2020: Suspension of direct flights from China after discussion with tourism industry stakeholders.
- 26 Feb 2020: Suspension of entry of cruise liners.
- 13 Mar 2020: Excursions from guesthouses, resorts and safaris banned in order to stop potential spread of the virus.
- 14 Mar 2020: All travel to and from resorts banned, in effect locking down all the resorts with guests and staff resident at the time.
- 17 March 2020: Ordered all guesthouses the Greater Male' Area to be closed for new visitors, existing guests were allowed until the end of their stay.
- 20 March 2020: Ordered all Maldivians arriving from abroad to be quarantined for 14 days and that tourists arriving shall travel directly to their resorts
- 27th March 2020: Suspended on-arrival visas to visitors.
- 28 March 2020: Suspended airport operations from 9 pm to 6 am in response to reduced air traffic due to border closures around the world.
- 15th April 2020: Government announced lockdown for 24 hours Greater Male' area
- 17<sup>th</sup> April 2020: Government extended the lockdown for 14 days for Greater Male' area
- 19th April 2020: Suspended All domestic air travel.
- 29<sup>th</sup> April 2020: Government extended the lockdown for another 14 days for Greater Male' area

As local restrictions were being imposed and borders around the world were closed resorts began closing their doors during the second and third week of March.

A tourist support center and hotline was established at Velana International Airport to help tourists stranded due to border closures and travel restrictions. Resorts remained operational for guests who remained, and several flights have been organized by the Government of Maldives in close cooperation with various countries to arrange travel for tourists of various nationalities stranded in the country.

A Covid-19 relief fund was established by the government to help sustain local industry and businesses. Various financial relief packages have now been announced for businesses of various sizes. Financial relief is also being offered to self-employed and people who have been laid off due to business closures. Relief to commercial entities are subject to a pledge that employees will not be laid off as a result of the crisis.





Upon identification of the first positive case for the virus on 7<sup>th</sup> March, the country elevated its alert level to level II Yellow.

On 12<sup>th</sup> March, WHO described the outbreak of Covid-19 as a pandemic. On the same day, the Maldives Director General of Public Health declared a nationwide public health emergency under the powers granted to her by article 33 of the Public Health Act. This is the first time in Maldivian history that such a declaration has been imposed.

- All government offices and other institutions were closed
- All schools and education institutions closed.
- HPA instructed people to stay at home and minimize contact with people in order to reduce the possibility of a potential outbreak among the population.
- On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March eating in at cafes and restaurants in the Male' Region was banned.
- On Friday 24<sup>th</sup> April, Finance minister Ibrahim Ameer has stated that Maldives could reopen its borders by July and recommence tourism by October.

### Current status

15<sup>th</sup> April: Maldives saw the first non-imported positive case of a Maldivian in Male' the capital. A strict lockdown of Male', Villingili and Hulhumale' was imposed on the same day. Subsequently travel between any inhabited islands have been prohibited. As more and more cases have been identified, some islands have been brought under lockdown.

As of today, there are 277 positive cases, 17 has recovered and 258 are active. Over 7876 tests have been done to date.

