

## **Covid 19 remains an imported disease in Maldives**

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Maldives' first Covid-19 cases emerged on March 7, 2020 when two migrant workers contracted the infection from an Italian tourist, who tested positive after returning to Italy.

By March 31, the remote Indian Ocean nation had 19 confirmed cases of the disease – three of whom were Maldivian nationals, who had returned from the United Kingdom, while the rest were either tourists or migrant workers. The numbers could be higher because so far limited testing has been done.

Maldives has been particularly vulnerable to the disease because of the high number of tourists visiting the country, which received 1.7 million tourists in 2019. Tourists from China were the largest by country of origin, accounting for nearly 20% of arrivals, followed by India and Italy. Moreover, the island country has significantly large population of migrant workers (approximately 100,000), who make up nearly a quarter of its total population. These workers, according to Human Rights Watch, live in congested shared quarters and do work that does not make it possible to practice strict social distancing and, therefore, were more vulnerable to a larger outbreak.

Maldives government ended visas on arrival for foreign visitors and restricted entry for travelers from the following countries: China, Iran, South Korea, Italy, Bangladesh, Germany, Spain and France. Tourist travel between atolls and to Male was also banned with no hotel check-ins permitted in capital Male.

The government imposed a national public health emergency on March 12, 2020 and introduced social distancing measures and temporarily closed down parks, schools and cinemas.

Working with the World Health Organization, the Maldives government established isolation and quarantine facilities and prepared hospitals for testing and treatment. Luxury resort hotels in the idyllic archipelago were converted into quarantine facilities.

Maldives' economy, which is heavily reliant on tourism, is likely to suffer badly from the pandemic. Revenue from international tourism make up nearly 40% of Maldives gross domestic product.

Update: Maldives had 20 confirmed cases of Covid-19 by April 11, 2020. However, only five of them were locals. Four had returned from UK, while the fifth came back from Phillipines. Maldivian Capital Male is facing a deluge of displaced migrant workers, who have been rendered jobless because of closure of luxury resorts. The state of emergency was, meanwhile, extended till April 30, 2020.