

Spain confirms first cases of coronavirus variant found in UK

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Madrid, December 26 (RHC)-- Four cases of a coronavirus variant that recently emerged in the United Kingdom and is believed to be particularly infectious, have been confirmed in Madrid, the regional government has said.

All four cases, the first detected in Spain, involved people who recently arrived from the UK, the Madrid regional government's deputy health chief Antonio Zapatero told a news conference on Saturday. "The patients are not seriously ill, we know that this strain is more transmissible, but it does not cause more serious illness," he said. "There is no need for alarm."

There are another three suspected cases of the coronavirus variant but the results of tests will only be available on Tuesday or Wednesday, Zapatero said.

On Friday, authorities in Lebanon and France also confirmed cases of the new variant.

Since Tuesday, Madrid has banned all entries from the UK except for Spanish nationals and residents.

The news comes as the Spanish government is expected to receive 4.5 million Pfizer vaccine doses over the next 12 weeks, enough to vaccinate some 2.2 million people, according to the ministry. The government expects to have between 15 million and 20 million people of its population of 47 million vaccinated against the virus by June.

The new strain of the virus, which experts fear is more contagious, has prompted more than 50 countries to impose travel restrictions on the UK.

The U.S. has announced it will require all passengers arriving from the UK to present a negative COVID-19 test for entry, while China suspended all flights from Britain over the new strain. Other countries that have suspended travel for Britons include France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Ireland, Belgium, Canada, India, Pakistan, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, Russia and Jordan.

In the Gulf, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Oman closed their borders completely.

Authorities in France, following a snap 48-hour travel ban this week, reopened its borders to the UK – partly to allow French citizens to return home, as well as to relieve the massive build-up of freight goods – but had introduced a testing policy.

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