

# US considering ban on travelers from Europe over virus: top official

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The United States is weighing a ban on travelers from Europe to slow the spread of the coronavirus, a senior US official said Wednesday.

"The question is a live question about how to treat Europe as a whole," said Ken Cuccinelli, the acting deputy secretary of the Department of Homeland Security.

"That is not to the level of using legal authorities to block travel yet. But it is under consideration," he told a congressional hearing.

"As each country, or in this case region, becomes more and more problematic it obviously gets reviewed on a day-to-day basis," Cuccinelli told the House Homeland Security Committee.

"Europe presents a unique problem," he said, pointing to the Schengen Area that maintains open borders between most of the Western European countries.

Cuccinelli, who is also acting director of US Citizenship and Immigration Services, said that Italy, the European country worst hit by the COVID-19 virus, is pre-screening passengers on all direct flights to the United States.

But Cuccinelli said the United States does not have adequate resources to screen travel by Italians or others who are flying indirectly to the United States from Europe.

He gave no additional information on the possibility of a ban.

Earlier a top government health expert said the largest threat to the country with respect to the virus is transmission from Europe.

"Where our real threat is right now is Europe," said Robert Redfield, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"That's where the cases are coming in from. If you want to be blunt,

Europe is the new China," he said.

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