Dubai orders hospitals to cancel surgeries amid virus surge

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The government of Dubai on Wednesday ordered all hospitals to cancel nonessential surgeries for the next month as coronavirus infections surge to unprecedented heights in the United Arab Emirates.

In a circular sent to government-run and private health centers across the emirate, Dubai's Health Authority announced that starting Thursday medical operations "may be allowed to continue only per medical urgency" as the city tries to keep its hospitals from becoming overrun.

For the ninth consecutive day, the UAE shattered its record for new infections, reporting 3,509 cases. The country does not release location data for infections, making it difficult to determine where in the federation of seven sheikhdoms has been hardest hit by the virus.

Dubai, its economy built largely on aviation, hospitality and retail, has remained open for tourism and business throughout weeks of skyrocketing cases. The capital of Abu Dhabi has retained tighter restrictions, requiring all who travel through to present a negative COVID-19 test.

Daily infections in the country have nearly tripled since November. Tens of thousands of tourists flooded Dubai to celebrate New Year's Eve and the holidays in recent weeks. The emirate mandates social distancing inside and masks outside, but otherwise a sense of normalcy prevails.

Overall, the outbreak in the UAE has infected over 260,000 people and killed 762 amid an aggressive testing campaign. The country's population, fewer than 10 million, is mostly comprised of young expatriate workers.

Meanwhile, Lebanon continued to grapple with record numbers as confirmed deaths surpassed 2,000.

The steep rise in infections and deaths in the small country of some 6 million comes despite a strict weeklong lockdown and as hospitals are overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients. The government will meet Thursday to consider whether to extend the nationwide lockdown beyond Feb. 1.

For the third straight day, a record number of deaths from the virus was recorded with 64 more recorded Wednesday. That brings the total number of deaths to 2,084 and over 264,000 infections since February last year.

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