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# 2020 coronavirus pandemic in Albania

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The [2019–20 coronavirus pandemic](#) was confirmed to have reached [Albania](#) on 8 March 2020, a father and son who had travelled from [Florence](#), Italy.<sup>[1]</sup> On 23 March, the total number of confirmed cases rose to 104.<sup>[2]</sup>

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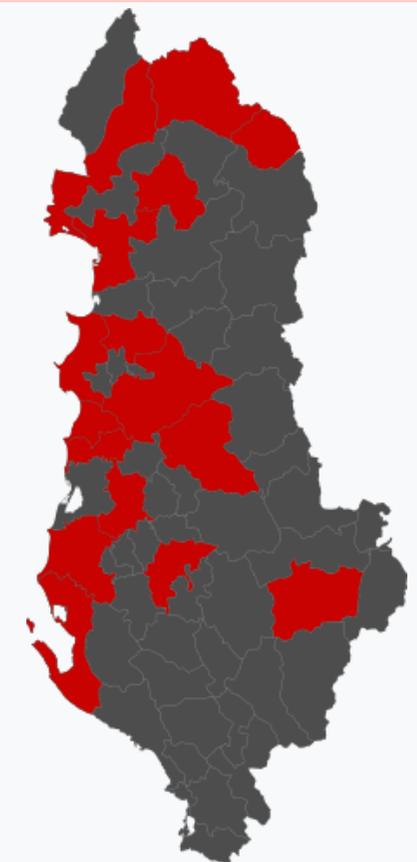
## Background [\[edit\]](#)

On 12 January, the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) confirmed that a [novel coronavirus](#) was the cause of a respiratory illness in a cluster of people in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China, who had initially come to the attention of the WHO on 31 December 2019. This cluster was initially linked to the [Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market](#) in Wuhan City. However, some of those first cases with laboratory confirmed results had no link to the market, and the source of the epidemic is unknown.<sup>[3][4]</sup>

Unlike [SARS of 2003](#), the [case fatality ratio](#) for COVID-19 <sup>[5][6]</sup> has been much lower, but the [transmission](#) has been significantly greater, with a significant total death toll.<sup>[7][5]</sup> COVID-19 typically appears with about seven days of [flu-like symptoms](#) followed by some people progressing to symptoms of a [viral pneumonia](#) requiring admission to hospital.<sup>[5]</sup> From 19 March, COVID-19 was no longer classified as a "High consequence infectious disease".<sup>[6]</sup>

## Timeline [\[edit\]](#)

### 2020 coronavirus pandemic in Albania



Map of municipalities with confirmed (red) coronavirus cases (as of 27 March 2020)

Disease [COVID-19](#)

On 8 March 2020, Albania confirmed its first two cases of [COVID-19](#), a father and son, of which, the son had traveled from [Florence, Italy](#).<sup>[8]</sup>

On 9 March, the [Ministry of Health and Social Protection](#) stated that a total of 65 people had been tested for [COVID-19](#), 2 of whom were positive.<sup>[9]</sup>

On 10 March, a total of 114 people had been tested for [COVID-19](#), 10 of whom were positive. Of these, 6 new cases were close contacts of the first 2, while the other 2 new cases had no connection. One such case was also from the city of [Durrës](#).<sup>[10]</sup>

On 10 March, President [Ilir Meta](#) called for retired Albanian doctors to re-enter the work force.<sup>[11]</sup>

On 10 March, it was discovered that a [Maryland](#) woman had contracted novel coronavirus after visiting Albania, as well as spending time in a Turkish airport.<sup>[12]</sup>

On 11 March, a total of 241 people were tested, 15 of whom were positive. 12 cases were close contacts of the first case, while the other two were from [Tirana](#) and [Lushnjë](#). The first death was also reported, an elderly woman in [Durrës](#).<sup>[13]</sup>

On 12 March, Vice Minister of Health and Social Protection Mira Rakacolli stated that during the last 24 hours 145 people had been tested for [COVID-19](#), for a total of 298 tests performed. Of those, 23 cases tested positive for the disease, 18 of which were [asymptomatic](#) and in self-isolation and 5 were hospitalized. All cases were stated to have had history of travel to Italy or been in contact with someone who had. In total 134 people were in [quarantine](#).<sup>[14]</sup>

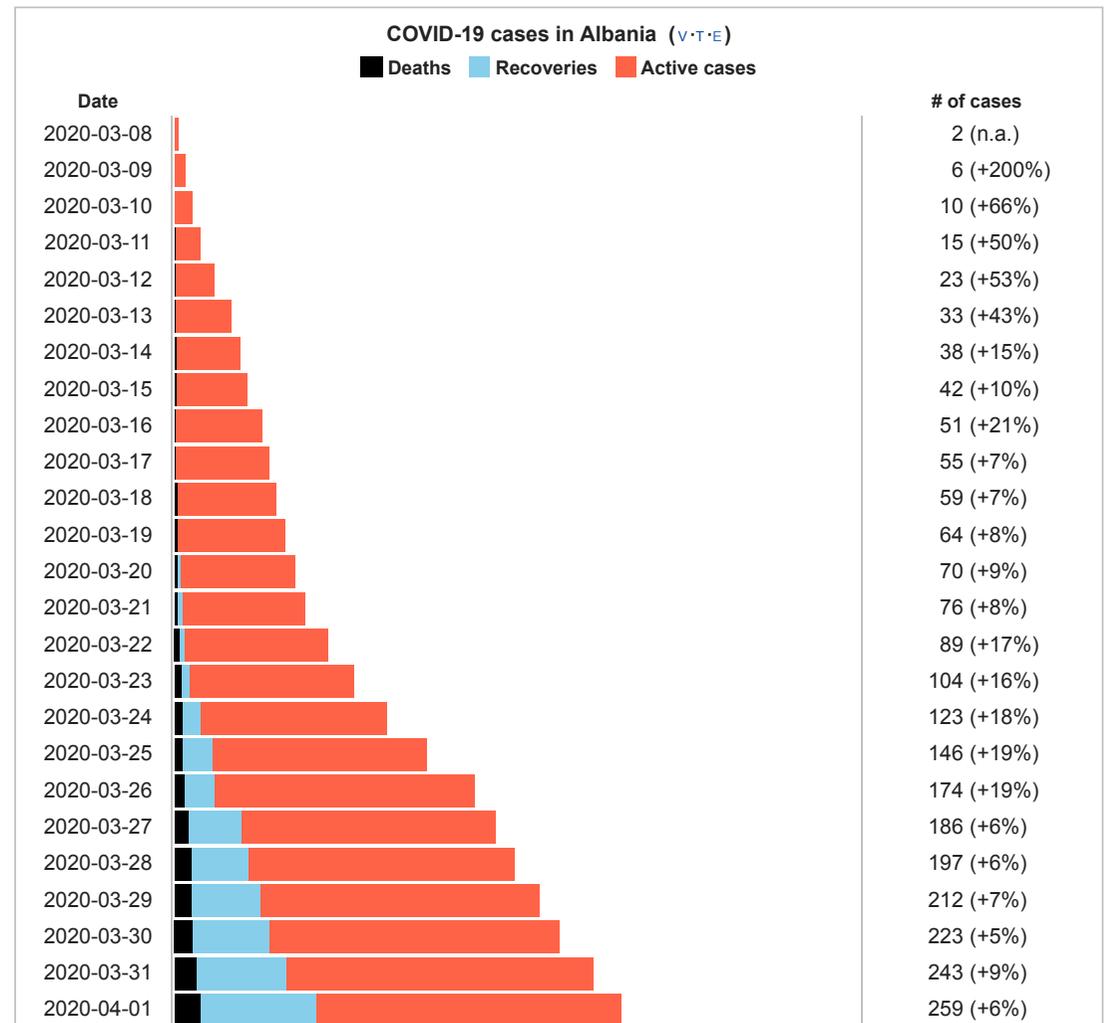
On 15 March, 42 cases were confirmed, 17 people were hospitalized, with 3 of them under intense hospital supervision.<sup>[15]</sup>

On 16 March, 51 cases were confirmed, 23 people were hospitalized, with 3 of them under intense hospital supervision.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

On 17 March, 55 cases were confirmed, 25 people were hospitalized, with 3 of them under intense hospital supervision. In the last 24 hours 42 persons were tested, with four of them testing positive bringing the number from 51 to 55.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

On 22 March, 89 cases were confirmed, 43 people were hospitalized, with 4 of them under intensive therapy. In the last 24 hours 33 people were tested, 13 of which were positive. The first 3 recoveries were discharged from the

<b>Virus strain</b>	<a href="#">SARS-CoV-2</a>
<b>Location</b>	<a href="#">Albania</a>
<b>First outbreak</b>	<a href="#">Italy</a>
<b>Index case</b>	<a href="#">Tirana</a>
<b>Arrival date</b>	8 March 2020 (4 weeks and 1 day)
<b>Confirmed cases</b>	377
<b>Active cases</b>	240
<b>Recovered</b>	116
<b>Deaths</b>	21
<b>Official website</b>	
<a href="https://coronavirus.al">coronavirus.al</a>	



hospital, to be put on quarantine for a further 14 days. Three new cases were reported in previously unaffected municipality of [Korçë](#).<sup>[16]</sup>

On 23 March, 104 cases were confirmed, 49 people were hospitalized, with 3 under intensive therapy. In the last 24 hours 45 people were tested, 15 of which were positive. New cases were discovered in [Shkodër](#) and [Vlorë](#), extending the infection map to two new municipalities. Two new deaths were also reported, a 71-year-old and a 43-year-old with preexisting health conditions, bringing the total to 4.<sup>[17]</sup>

On 24 March, 123 cases were confirmed, 57 people were hospitalized, with two of them under intensive therapy. In the last 24 hours 74 people were tested, 19 of which were positive. Another death was reported, a 49 year old from [Tirana](#), bringing the total death toll to 5, with recoveries at 10. The map of infections also extended to newly sprung cases from [Lezhë](#), [Has](#) and [Berat](#).<sup>[18]</sup>

On 25 March, 146 cases were confirmed, up 23 positive cases from 111 tests made in the last 24 hours. 72 people were hospitalized, 4 under intensive care of which 3 intubated and in critical condition. One new case was reported in the municipality of [Krujë](#). No deaths were reported, while 17 recoveries had been made.<sup>[19]</sup>

On 26 March, 174 cases were confirmed, up 28 positive cases from 103 tests made in the last 24 hours. 73 people were hospitalized, 3 under intensive care of which 2 intubated and in critical condition. Of all cases 4 were [pediatric](#), asymptomatic and in good health. The sixth victim of the disease was reported, a 71-year-old woman from [Tirana](#) who also suffered from [hypertension](#), after 7 days of hospitalization and intensive care. The map of infections extended to include [Tropoja](#).<sup>[20]</sup>

On 27 March, 186 cases were confirmed, up 12 positive cases from 102 tests made in the last 24 hours. 77 people were hospitalized, 5 under intensive care. Two new deaths were reported in the morning, an 85-year-old woman from Tirana and a 66-year-old man from Fier, for a total of 8. Another 14 recoveries were made, for a total of 31. New case was reported in [Pukë](#), further expanding the map of infections.<sup>[21]</sup>

On 28 March, 197 cases were confirmed, up 11 positive cases from 79 tests made in the last 24 hours. 74 people were hospitalized, 4 under intensive care. The death toll rose to 10, with recoveries at 33, of which 6 were doctors and medical staff.<sup>[22]</sup>

On 29 March, 212 cases were confirmed, up 15 positive cases from 111 tests made in the last 24 hours. 76 people were hospitalized, 6 under intensive care, of which 4 intubated. Seven new recoveries were made for a total of 40. The map of infections expanded with a new case in [Mirditë](#), with other new cases in [Tiranë](#), [Durrës](#) and [Fier](#).<sup>[23]</sup>

On 30 March, 223 cases were confirmed, up 11 positive cases from 90 tests made in the last 24 hours. 74 people were hospitalized, 7 under intensive care, of which 4 intubated. Four new recoveries were made, for a total of 44, while fatalities rose to 11 after a 79-year-old from Tirana died.<sup>[24]</sup>

On 31 March, 243 cases were confirmed, up 20 positive cases from 145 tests made in the last 24 hours. 77 people were hospitalized, 8 under intensive care, of which 3 intubated. Eight new recoveries were made totaling 52, while fatalities rose to 13 after the deaths of an 82-year-old woman from Tirana and a 62-year-old from [Durrës](#).<sup>[25]</sup>

On 1 April, 259 cases were confirmed, up 16 positive cases from 152 tests made in the last 24 hours. 79 people were hospitalized, 7 under intensive care, of which 4 intubated. Fifteen new recoveries were made totaling 67, while the death toll rose to 15.<sup>[26]</sup>

On 2 April, 277 cases were confirmed, up 18 positive cases from 96 tests made in the last 24 hours. 81 people were hospitalized, 8 under intensive care, of which 4 intubated. One new death was reported, a 78-year-old from [Durrës](#), bringing the total to 16, while recoveries rose to 76.<sup>[27]</sup>



Source:

- [Ministry of Health and Social Protection](#) [1]

On 3 April, 304 cases were confirmed, and 112 tests were performed in the last 24 hours. A big rise was seen in the municipality of [Shkodër](#), where 12 new cases from 2 families were discovered, both had members who had previously tested positive for the disease. Meanwhile, 73 people were hospitalized in the Infective Hospital in Tirana, while 4 others in a recently COVID-19-adapted "Shefqet Ndroqi" hospital in Durrës. Recoveries jumped to 89 while deaths went up by one for a total of 17.<sup>[28]</sup>

## Prevention measures [ edit ]

On 25 February, Skender Brataj, head of the National Medical Emergency Center (NMEC), announced protocols in case COVID-19 spread to [Albania](#), explaining that citizens that suspect they have contracted the virus should call the designated National Emergency Number 127.<sup>[29]</sup> He instructed all Albanian citizens arriving from [China](#), [Singapore](#), [Iran](#), [South Korea](#) or [Italy](#), to call the same number, so that a medical group with protective suits can escort them to an infections hospital for testing, with all samples sent to the Public Health Institute.<sup>[29]</sup> On the same day, the [Albanian Ministry of Health and Social Protection](#) met with the Technical Expert Committee, and decided to increase its hospital budget by \$1 million, to increase the stock of personal protection equipment.<sup>[29]</sup> Brataj also announced the formation of a task force, while asserting that [COVID-19](#) had not yet arrived in Albania. He specified that citizens coming from affected areas would be monitored for 14 days and treated as suspected cases, and treated with [vitamins](#).<sup>[29]</sup>

## After the arrival of COVID-19 [ edit ]

On 8 March, the [Albanian government](#) stopped all flights and ferries with quarantined areas of [northern Italy](#) until 3 April,<sup>[30]</sup> halted all schools for two weeks, ordered cancellation of all large public gatherings, and asked sports federations to cancel scheduled matches.<sup>[31]</sup> Albanian Health Minister Olgeta Manastirliu announced that anyone entering Albania from quarantined areas of Italy will have to self-isolate, or face punishment if they fail to do so.<sup>[31]</sup>

## Beginning of lockdown [ edit ]

On 10 March, all citizens were alerted of the new lockdown policy by text from [Prime Minister Edi Rama](#), who said the policy was regrettable but necessary, with the text also telling them to be safe, wash their hands and avoid fake news, while also announcing a vehicle ban.<sup>[32]</sup> Use of private cars and intercity transport vehicles was banned in [Tirana](#) and [Durrës](#), and all private and public transport was banned in [Shkodra](#), [Lezha](#), [Elbasani](#), [Lushnja](#), [Fieri](#) and [Vlora](#), with the only vehicles allowed being ambulances and vehicles for delivering essentials.<sup>[32]</sup> Bonuses of 1000 euros were added to the salaries of medical staff, and a 500 euro bonus was added to the salary of medical workers.<sup>[32]</sup> The disinfection of all public places was also underway.<sup>[32]</sup> The retired would get their pensions delivered at home with no charge.<sup>[32]</sup> Bars, restaurants, gyms, discos, and venues with live music were all ordered to close.<sup>[32]</sup>

Rama also announced an expansion of the areas from which arrivals must self-isolate, to newly include all of Italy as well as all of [Greece](#), and ordered police to patrol the streets, detain any violators, and penalize them with a 5000 euro fine.<sup>[32][33]</sup> The army and police mobilized to patrol the streets and search for any citizens with self-isolation orders who could be violating them.<sup>[32]</sup>

Gjergj Erebara at *Balkan Insight* noted that much of the Albanian medical staff had emigrated to [Germany](#) in the previous few years, leaving Albanian hospitals with an acute shortage, having already had a rather low rate of doctors per inhabitant.<sup>[34]</sup>

On the night of 11 March, police vehicles played messages on loudspeakers telling citizens to return inside.<sup>[35]</sup> The [Muslim community](#) announced on 11 March that all sermons, prayers and other activities, including [jummahs](#), and [mosques](#) were canceled, and told all believers to quarantine themselves and observe prayers at home in private, and rigorously follow and observe the recommendations of the [World Health Organization](#).<sup>[36]</sup> By 12 March, 500 people had been charged for violating the travel ban.<sup>[32]</sup>

## "War" against COVID-19 [ edit ]

On 12 March, Prime Minister Edi Rama declared a "war" on COVID-19.<sup>[37]</sup> A slew of new measures were announced, including a 72-hour [curfew](#) during which only transportation of basic needs such as food and medicine would be permitted, a three-month loan holiday, and the forced closure of garment factories and call centres (which are dependent on the Italian market).<sup>[37]</sup> The police and the army mobilized and set up a total of 70 [checkpoints](#)<sup>[disambiguation needed]</sup> on that day, spread throughout the country to make sure people are complying with self-quarantine requirements. At checkpoints, names are checked against a database of who has been in Italy or Greece since 27 February. Police in some parts of the country, including [Fier](#), began stopping cars with foreign license plates. Fier proceeded to force the closure of most bars and cafes, while Tirana and Durrës suspended indefinitely all public transport and shut all [cafes](#), [bars](#), [restaurants](#), as well as [gyms](#) and government offices with public-facing counters.<sup>[35]</sup> All [banks](#) were closed from the 12 to 16 March, but [ATMs](#) remained open.<sup>[38]</sup>

The [Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church](#) announced on 12 March the suspension of all services until 3 April, except for the [Divine Liturgy](#) on Sunday, in which it encouraged followers to come for "healing" but keep a distance from each other; the Church also encouraged believers to observe rites at home, with the Church's radio station "Ngjallja" ("Resurrection") broadcasting services, although churches would remain to serve those who wished to perform personal prayer while keeping a distance from others.<sup>[39]</sup> The Catholic church suspended all diocesan and parish activities, all liturgical celebrations including the [Holy Mass](#), all [catechisms](#), all educational courses at community centers and all other [parish](#) and [diocesan](#) activities. Churches remained open for personal confessions done at a distance, as well as personal prayer done at a distance from other people, while observing the recommendations of authorities.<sup>[40]</sup> The Albanian Evangelical Church likewise transmitted services online.<sup>[40]</sup> The [Bektashi Global Kryegjyshata](#) suspended all religious activities in its [tekkes](#) on 12 March as well.<sup>[41]</sup>

From 13 March, Albania implemented a hardening of its lockdown in major cities across the country, including the capital, Tirana, over the weekend until 15 March at midnight. Roads connecting major cities were also closed. Foreign nationals that need to go to the airport needed to have received written permission from the police to use the roads. All public facilities at the airport were closed, including restaurants and bars.<sup>[42]</sup> Sea travel from Greece and Italy was prohibited except for freight vessels.<sup>[43]</sup>

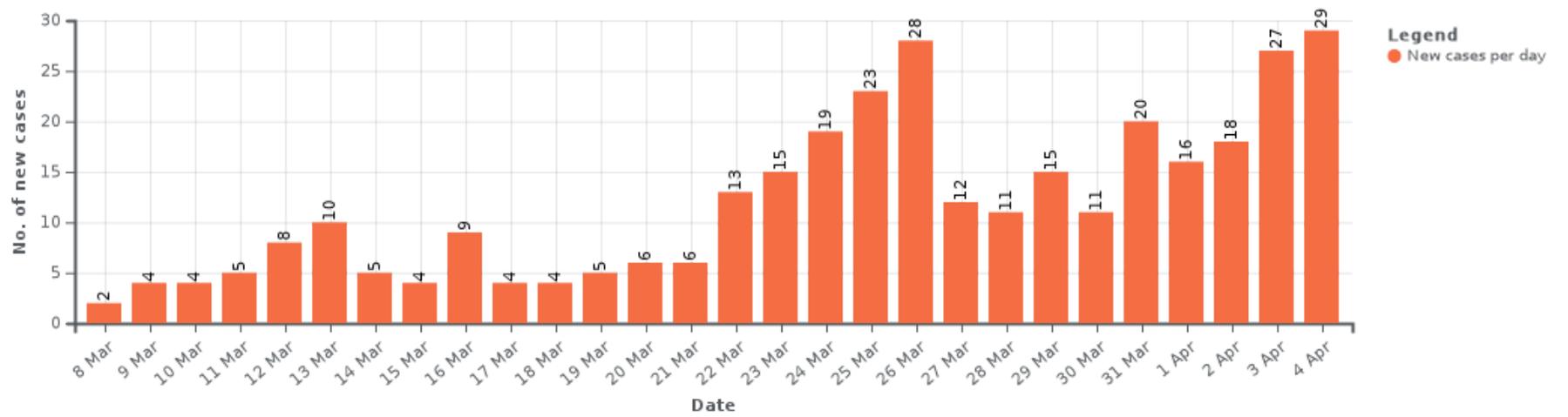
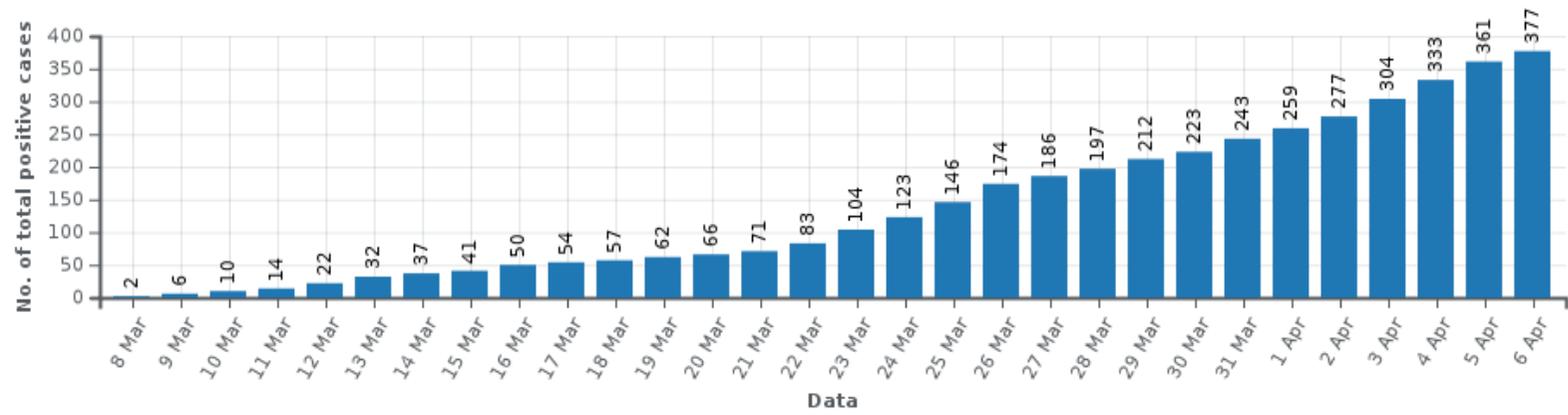
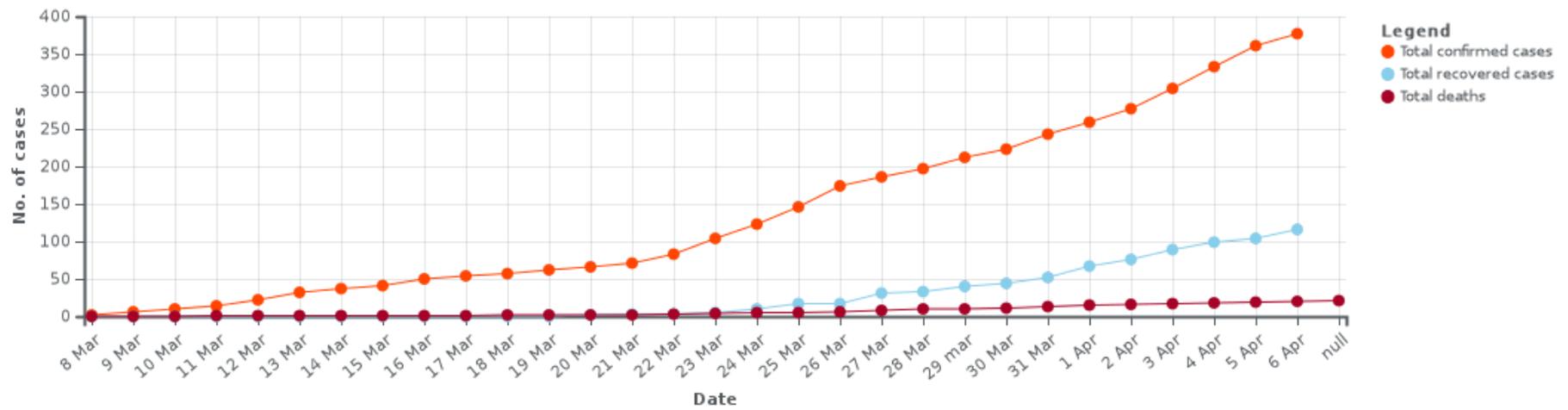
On 15 March, Albania closed all of its land borders until further notice, making all travel from [Montenegro](#), [Kosovo](#), [North Macedonia](#), and Greece prohibited.<sup>[43]</sup> Educational institutions were ordered to prepare to move [k-12](#) instructions online.<sup>[38]</sup> All physical government operations except essential activities were shut down, and [civil servants](#) ordered to stay down, but online services continued. All [museums](#), [cinemas](#), theatres, and public parks were closed indefinitely.<sup>[38]</sup> The Albanian government began organizing a charter flight to extract remaining Albanian citizens in Italy; all air travel to Italy and Greece was indefinitely suspended.<sup>[38]</sup> As of 15 March, in addition to the private vehicle ban, the public transportation ban was extended to the [Shkodër-Lezhë](#), [Elbasani-Korçë](#), [Lushnjë-Fieri](#), and [Fieri-Vlorë](#) roads.<sup>[38]</sup>

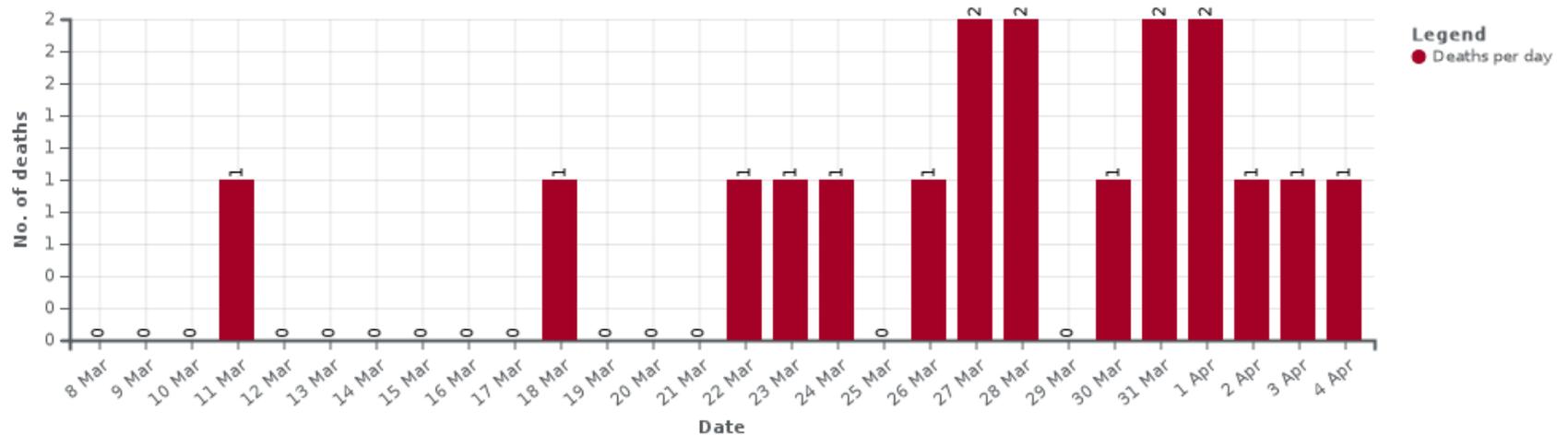
On 16 March, Albania indefinitely suspended all air traffic to and from the [United Kingdom](#).<sup>[44]</sup>

On 16 March, another wide-ranging "emergency legislation" was adopted, specifying various fines for violations of protocol, to be effective immediately. Social, cultural, and political gatherings, whether in enclosed or open-air spaces, were banned, and violators could be fined up to 5 million [lek](#) (or 40,000 euros). Television stations were banned from having more than two people in the same room for a talk show, on the pain of a 1 million lek fine (8300 euros). Private hospitals that refuse to offer capacities were to be fined up to 5 million lek (40000 euros). Any trade in food or medicine that did not comply with the specified government safety regulations to combat infections risked a fine of up to 10 million lek (83000 euros). The legislation, called a "normative act", is an emergency law taking effect without prior approval by parliament.<sup>[45]</sup> Furthermore, a national curfew was imposed: each day, all citizens were required to return to stay in their homes from 18:00 onward, as well as a ban on sitting in public places. Those found in violation will be fined.<sup>[46]</sup> On 18 March, the [Tirana Times](#) suspended its print version.<sup>[47]</sup>

The handling of the coronavirus pandemic risk to [refugees](#) has been criticized as inadequate. Two [detention centers](#) exist in Albania. Their conditions have been reported as having very poor conditions that increase the danger of exposure to the pandemic.<sup>[48]</sup>

On 29 March, Albania sent a group of thirty medical staff members to [Lombardy](#), Italy. Prime Minister [Edi Rama](#) said his country was thanking [former Italian help](#).<sup>[49]</sup>





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