

Japan's Hokkaido region urges people to stay home over virus fears

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Japan's coronavirus-hit Hokkaido region on Friday asked residents to stay at home over the weekend as the northern area struggles to contain a fast-spreading outbreak.

Governor Naomichi Suzuki declared a state-of-emergency through March 19.

"I believe it is necessary to take unprecedented, drastic steps," Suzuki told a televised meeting of local government executives.

Hokkaido [region](#), known for ski resorts and vast forests, has seen at least 63 coronavirus cases, including two deaths, and accounts for more than a quarter of all cases in Japan, apart from those on the Diamond Princess cruise ship.

The central government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has already dispatched a team of experts and officials to the region to contain the virus.

"I ask for help of all Hokkaido residents to protect lives and health of you and your loved ones and to ensure swift ending of the situation," the governor

said.

"To prevent further spread of the virus, please refrain from going out during the weekend," he said.

The region's [ski resorts](#) attract many wealthy Asian tourists, including from China.

Suzuki has already asked for [local schools](#) to be closed, but he did not announce any further concrete measures to fight the outbreak.

The virus has so far infected at least 210 people across the country, including Hokkaido, and been linked to five deaths.

Abe, who on Thursday also requested nationwide closure of schools, has said efforts during the coming weeks will determine whether the [outbreak](#) can be contained, a major concern in the run-up to Tokyo Olympics in July.

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