



Covid-19: Portugal closes all medical schools after 31 cases confirmed in the country

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Portugal has temporarily closed all its medical schools in an attempt to slow the transmission of covid-19, after 39 cases were confirmed (as of 10 March).

The decision was announced by the National Council of Medical Schools as a way of reducing contact between students and teachers who treat patients. Around 12 500 students are affected.

The move follows the Italian government's decision to close all schools and universities across the country. Compared with Portugal, however, Italy has significantly more cases with over 9000 confirmed and more than 400 deaths. The Italian government has placed the entire country on lockdown.

Fausto Pinto, national coordinator of the Medical Schools Council in Portugal, and dean of medicine at the University of Lisbon, posted a response to the closures on social media.¹ "We are doing our part to try to prevent a catastrophe of the dimensions of what is happening, for example, in Italy," he wrote.

José Pedro Charreu, a fourth year medical student at the University of Lisbon, told *The BMJ*, "My college has decided to go the extra mile and now all faculties are closed. What we know is that all medical courses are supposed to convert to a video conferencing format, but we don't yet know how it will impact exams.

"These measures are being contested but it is clear for health authorities that we need to do more than Italy did in the beginning to prevent the same scenario happening here."

The closures could have the most significant impact on final year medical students, who face delays to their practical

assessments and therefore their graduation. Closures could also have a knock on effect on residency exams, which take place in November.

Some medical schools in other countries, such as Romania, have also been closed because of covid-19. In the UK they continue to run as normal.

The UK government has said it may extend the rights of final year medical school students and year one foundation doctors if the situation requires it, while retired doctors could also be asked to return to practise.² The UK has reported 319 confirmed cases, 80 of those in England, with six deaths (as of 2pm on 10 March).

The NHS set out measures this week for covid-19 patients in England to be managed at home if they are assessed as not needing immediate admission to hospital.³

Globally, covid-19 has spread to more than 100 countries and has infected around 115 000 people (as of 10 March). There have been over 4000 deaths, while 64 000 are reported as recovered.

1 Pinto F. @fjpinto1960. 10 March 2020. <https://twitter.com/fjpinto1960/status/1237175679042674694>.

2 Mahase E. Covid-19: 90% of cases will hit NHS over nine week period, chief medical officer warns. *BMJ* 2020;368:m918. 10.1136/bmj.m918.32139397

3 Mahase E. Covid-19: out-of-hours providers are drafted in to manage non-urgent patients in community. *BMJ* 2020;368:m959. 10.1136/bmj.m959.

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