

Coronavirus Alert: Russian Cossacks Told Not to Kiss Orthodox Icons

By [Reuters](#)

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The Cossacks are traditional militia units that once protected Russia's borderlands. **Mikhail Tereshchenko / TASS**

Russian Cossacks have been told by one of their leaders not to kiss icons or clerics' hands to try to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

The order was issued by Gennadiy Kovalev, head of the Council of Cossack Hetmans (leaders) of Russia which represents several thousand Cossacks, traditional militia units that once protected Russia's borderlands.

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Kissing icons is a common practice in the Russian Orthodox Church, and Kovalev said the order was prompted by reports about the health of Pope Francis, who said on Sunday he had a

cold.

Other Cossacks said they would defy the order, which coincided with the season of Lent, when Christians are urged to occasionally fast and the Russian Orthodox Church holds special ceremonies.

The head of a rival national Cossack organization rejected Kovalev's order and said it did not apply to its members, the state-run RIA news agency said.

Russia has reported six cases of the virus, which originated in China, no deaths.

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