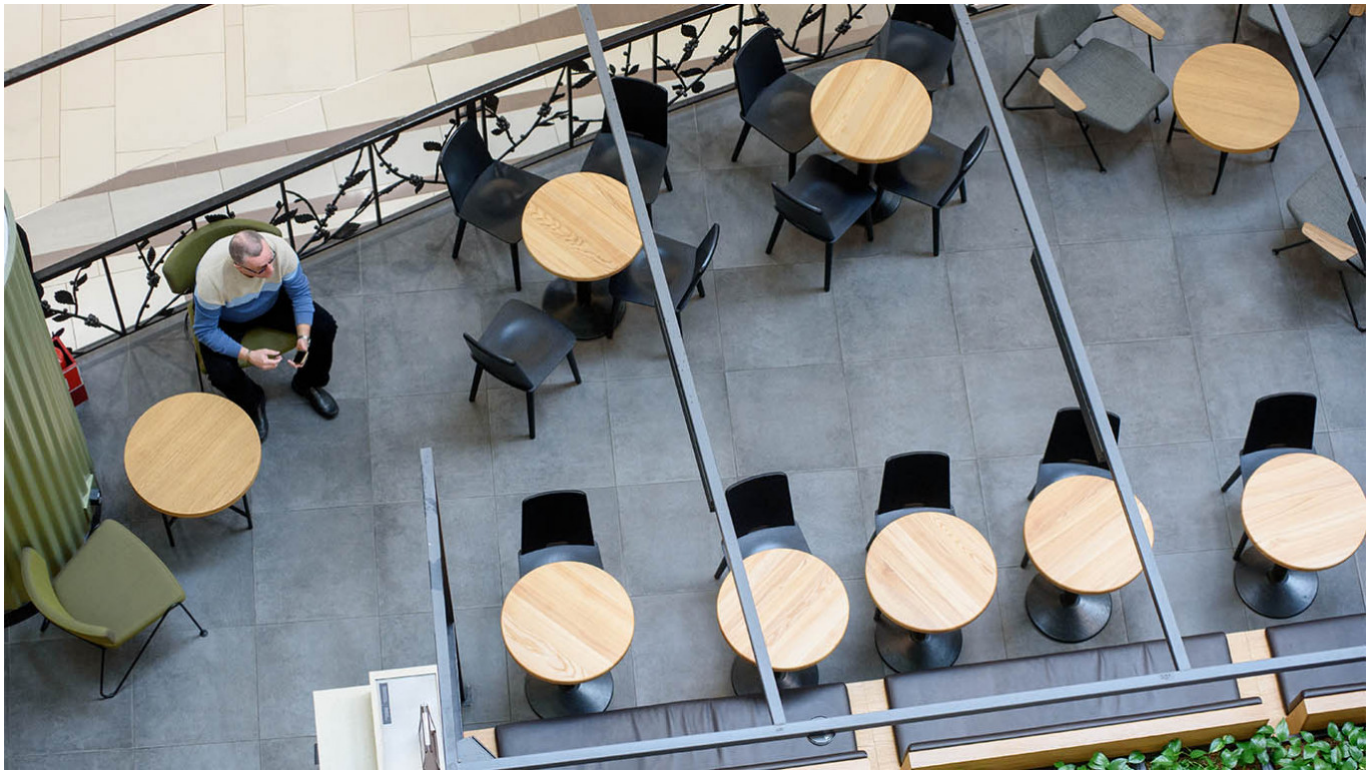
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Moscow to Shut Cafes, Shops in 'Unprecedented' Virus Measure

By AFP

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Starting Saturday, most non-essential services will be closed for a week in the capital. **Sergei Yermokhin / TASS**

Moscow will close cafes, shops, parks and other non-essential services for one week starting Saturday, its mayor said Thursday, in an "unprecedented" move to fight the spread of coronavirus.

President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday announced a non-working week from March 28 to April 5 to keep Russians at home. But the measures imposed by Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin take the president's measures a step further.

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Sobyanin had already ordered Muscovites aged over 65 to stay home starting Thursday, but stopped short of ordering a strict quarantine.

The closures announced Thursday "are not a holiday, it is a serious measure to prevent COVID-19," the mayor said in a statement on his website.

All cafes and restaurants must stop admitting customers and may only deliver food or prepare orders to go, according to the decree.

Stores selling non-essential items must close, as well as beauty salons and spas. Moscow's parks will also shut.

The mayor first hinted at the new measures in a televised interview Wednesday evening, saying "there will be nothing to do in Moscow" next week.

"The restrictions ordered today are unprecedented in Moscow's modern history and will create many inconveniences," Sobyanin said in his message Thursday.

"But trust me, they are absolutely necessary to slow the spread of the coronavirus infection and decrease the number of the ill," he said, also asking Russians from other regions to put off travel to the capital.

Moscow registered two coronavirus-linked deaths on Wednesday, the first nationally. A total of 840 cases have been recorded nationwide, according to official statistics on Thursday.

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