

# Israeli airline eyes mass job cuts over coronavirus

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Passengers walk past check-in counters while wearing protective masks at Ben Gurion International Airport, near Tel Aviv

Israeli airline El Al said Sunday it was considering firing 1,000 staff out of its total workforce of around 6,000 due to losses linked to the novel coronavirus outbreak.

A company spokesman confirmed the plan to AFP but would not give further details.

Israel has cancelled direct flights to and from areas of high contamination and has barred foreign nationals from entering the country if they have travelled from such areas.

Last week, El Al was ordered to cancel its service to Italy following health ministry warnings, Tel Aviv business daily Globes reported.

In a report last week to the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange, before the reported Italy route closure, El Al estimated its losses from the COVID-19 virus for the first quarter of 2020 at between \$50-70 million.

At a protest by El Al workers Sunday at Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion airport, the head of the Histadrut trade unions federation said the carrier and others in the industry were "facing collapse".

"We are in an emergency," a Histadrut statement quoted chairman Arnon Ben-David as saying. "El Al... is facing collapse and nobody cares..."

"I am appealing to the Israeli government and its leader... an emergency and an interim support payment must be given to the company so that it can survive."

He said the union and El Al workers' committee were engaged in "marathon talks" with management.

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