

NASA suspends work on Moon rocket due to virus

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NASA has suspended work on the massive Space Launch System rocket at the Michoud Assembly Facility in New Orleans

NASA said it has suspended work on building and testing the rocket and capsule for its Artemis manned mission to the Moon due to the rising

number of coronavirus cases in the community.

The [space agency](#) is shutting down its Michoud Assembly Facility in New Orleans, where the Space Launch System rocket is being built, and the nearby Stennis Space Center, administrator Jim Bridenstine said late Thursday.

"The change at Stennis was made due to the rising number of COVID-19 cases in the community around the center, the number of self-isolation cases within our workforce there, and one confirmed case among our Stennis team," he said.

"NASA will temporarily suspend production and testing of Space Launch System and Orion hardware. The NASA and contractors teams will complete an orderly shutdown that puts all hardware in a safe condition until work can resume."

The Space Launch System is a powerful deep [space rocket](#) to transport astronauts to the Moon and beyond while Orion is the crew module.

The virus outbreak could hit US plans to return to the Moon by 2024.

"We realize there will be impacts to NASA missions, but as our teams work to analyze the full picture and reduce risks we understand that our top priority is the health and safety of the NASA workforce," Bridenstine said.

A manned return to the Moon is the first part of the Artemis program to set up a long-term colony and test technologies for a crewed mission to Mars in the 2030s.

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