

Philippine villagers brace as volcano grows restive

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Philippine villagers near a restive volcano on a central island are bracing for possible evacuations that would require physical distancing because of the coronavirus pandemic, an official said Wednesday.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said it detected dozens of small earthquakes on the western flank of Kanlaon volcano, which emitted plumes of steam up to 300 meters (980 feet) in the air overnight. Kanlaon on Negros island is one of about two dozen [active volcanoes](#) in the Philippines.

Those signs, along with a slight bulging of Kanlaon's slope, "indicate that hydrothermal or magmatic activity is occurring beneath the edifice," the institute said. It added that the volcano "is at an abnormal condition and has entered a period of unrest."

Zeaphard Caelian, who heads the disaster response agency in Negros Occidental province, said authorities issued an initial alert in March after Kanlaon began showing signs of restiveness, which intensified last weekend.

More than 20,000 people in eight villages within 6 to 12 kilometers (4 to 7 miles) of Kanlaon would have to be evacuated if the volcano shows signs of an imminent eruption. Officials are identifying evacuation centers where physical distancing could to be observed to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, Caelian said.

The Philippines has reported more than 32,000 confirmed coronavirus infections, including 1,204 deaths, among the highest in Southeast Asia.

The [volcano](#)-monitoring institute warned the public from venturing into a permanent 4-kilometer (2.4-mile) danger zone around Kanlaon due to possible sudden eruptions of steam. It advised airplanes to avoid flying close to the summit of the 2,465-meter (8,087-foot) mountain.

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