COVID-19 Outbreak Declared a Pandemic

The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a pandemic, ie the 'worldwide spread' of a new disease.

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"We have never before seen a pandemic sparked by a coronavirus," said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General of the WHO. "And we have never before seen a pandemic that can be controlled, at the same time," he said, referring to China and South Korea where the numbers of cases are decreasing.

In the past two weeks, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases outside China has increased 13-fold, and the number of affected countries has reached at least 114. The virus has now spread to every continent except for Antarctica. As of 11 March 2020, there are 118,000 cases with more with than 4,000 deaths. Four countries account for 90% of the cases – China (80,967), Italy (10,149), Iran (9,000) and South Corea (7,755).

Italy is in the lockout; countries like Israel, India, Kuwait have banned foreign visitors and Guatemala has banned Europeans from entry. With Cyprus now having confirmed the first cases, all 27 EU countries are affected. First deaths have been announced in Belgium, Ireland, Sweden and Bulgaria, while a first case has been confirmed in Turkey.

In January, the WHO declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a public health emergency of international concern.

The last pandemic reported in the world was the H1N1 flu pandemic in 2009. It killed more than 18,000 people in more than 214 countries and territories, according to the WHO.

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 (WHO):

- fever (88% of cases)
- dry cough (68%)
- fatigue (38%)
- sputum/phlegm production (33%)
- shortness of breath (20%)
- sore throat or headache (13%)

Sources: WHO, The Guardian, NPR
Image credit: iStock

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