



Despite Measures, Coronavirus Continues to Spread



By 27 January, the number of people killed in China by the new coronavirus has risen to 81, with almost 3,000 confirmed ill.

The centre of the outbreak, Wuhan, is the capital of Hubei province, in which 76 deaths have occurred, with five deaths elsewhere. In an attempt to contain the spread of the virus, the city is in lockdown, several other cities have imposed travel and work bans, and the national new year holiday has been extended by three days.

So far, at least 44 cases (none fatal) have been confirmed in countries other than China, such as Thailand, the United States, Canada, Japan, South Korea and Australia. Hong Kong, which has eight confirmed cases, has declared a city-wide emergency. Mongolia has pre-emptively closed its border with China. Other countries, such as the UK, have carried out tests on suspected cases and are considering evacuating citizens.

The coronavirus (2019-nCoV) causes severe acute respiratory infection. Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties with pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, and kidney failure among the most serious symptoms. The ultimate scope and effect of this outbreak is unclear at present as the situation is rapidly evolving. Most of the deaths have been of elderly people or those with pre-existing respiratory problems. There is no specific cure or vaccine for 2019-nCoV.

Over the weekend, China's health minister Ma Xiaowei [stated](#) that the virus is able to spread during its incubation period and the ability of the virus to spread appears to be strengthening. The incubation period lasts from one to 14 days, which makes it harder to contain the illness.

Last week, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) estimated the likelihood of introduction of the virus to the EU as 'moderate,' while the Platform for European Preparedness Against (Re-)emerging Epidemics (PREPARE) activated its Mode 1. It involves getting clinical sites and diagnostics labs ready and discussing the research questions including the best treatment strategies.

As [reported by Euronews](#), the ECDC does not consider entry screening as an effective measure for

detecting incoming travellers with infectious diseases. However, there may be targeted measures for people from direct incoming flights. The only EU airports providing direct flights to Wuhan are London, Paris and Rome. In the meantime, entry screenings are to be conducted in Australia and the US. Japan and South Korea have also increased airport screenings.

The director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, is in Beijing to discuss [the outbreak](#) with the Chinese government and health experts. Back in 2017, the WHO placed two other highly pathogenic human coronaviruses – severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV, outbreak in 2002) and Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV, outbreak in 2012) on its Priority Pathogen list, hoping to galvanize research and the development of countermeasures against CoVs (Paules et al. 2020). And contrary to previous pandemics, the international response this time has so far been very fast.

[WHO recommends](#) that those travelling to China avoid close contact with people suffering from acute respiratory infections as well as with live or dead farm or wild animals. It also advises its 'standard recommendations' focusing on hand and respiratory hygiene, and safe food practices. Namely:

- Frequently clean hands by using alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.
- When coughing and sneezing cover mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue – throw tissue away immediately and wash hands.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who has fever and cough.
- If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing seek medical care early and share previous travel history with your health care provider.
- When visiting live markets in areas currently experiencing cases of novel coronavirus, avoid direct unprotected contact with live animals and surfaces in contact with animals.
- The consumption of raw or undercooked animal products should be avoided. Raw meat, milk or animal organs should be handled with care, to avoid cross-contamination with uncooked foods, as per good food safety practices.

References

Paules CI, Marston HD, Fauci AS (2020) Coronavirus Infections—More Than Just the Common Cold. JAMA. Published online January 23, 2020. Available from jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2759815?guestAccessKey=da12c4d9-bed5-4c36-88cf-4db717115947

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