

Efforts Intensify to Contain New Coronavirus

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The outbreak of the new coronavirus that started in the Chinese city of Wuhan has mobilized medical efforts around the world.

The World Health Organization declared the outbreak a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern” on Thursday.

By Friday, the disease had killed more than 200 people in China and infected thousands.

The fast-spreading virus, which first appeared in central China in December, has been confirmed in more than 20 countries and territories. The list includes Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia. But countries outside of Asia – including the United States, Australia, Canada, Germany, Britain and France – have reported confirmed cases.

Most of those who have been infected in other countries had recently visited Wuhan.

China has barred travel from Wuhan and other cities in central Hubei province. The ban places a partial **quarantine** on more than 50 million people – something that has never happened before.

Travel advisories

Some nations have completely closed their borders to avoid infections, such as Mongolia and North Korea. Russia has closed its land border with China, which extends more than 4,000 kilometers.

The U.S. State Department on Thursday released a “Do Not Travel” [advisory](#) for China and has advised Americans in the country to leave.

Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said that the warning was not **appropriate** for the situation.

However, foreign visitors are rushing to leave China, with countries including Japan and the U.S. sending special flights to help citizens return.

Late Friday, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released an order aimed at protecting returning travelers and the public. It said that all 195 U.S. citizens who returned to the United States on a special flight from Wuhan would be quarantined for 14 days.

In addition, the Administration of President Donald Trump declared a public health emergency in the U.S. Starting on Sunday, U.S. Citizens who have been to Hubei province will face a 14-day required quarantine. Other actions include a temporary suspension of entry for foreign nationals who have traveled in China in the last 14 days. The suspension does not affect close family of U.S. citizens or permanent residents.

Also on Friday, Reuters news agency reported that Wuhan’s Communist Party chief, Ma Guoqiang, said the effects of the virus on China and the world “would have been less” had containment efforts started sooner.

On the same day, Wuhan's mayor, Zhou Xianwang, said the job of containing the virus remains "severe and complex." The city's vice mayor said supplies of masks and other medical resources were still not enough.

Medical response

Officials in Wuhan are hurrying to complete two emergency hospitals. The plan is for one hospital with 1,000 beds to open by February 3.

State media report that the city plans to finish a second temporary hospital in two weeks. It will offer 1,300 more beds for treating more patients who may have the virus.

On Wednesday, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said it had sent six tons of supplies to Wuhan. UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore said, "This coronavirus is spreading at a **breakneck** speed and it is important to put all the necessary resources into halting it."

The declaration of a health emergency permits the WHO to provide assistance to other low- and middle-**income** countries. It also urges cooperation in disease control measures.

The United States offered to send its health experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to China to help in the efforts to contain the disease.

The CDC says the new coronavirus can spread through contact with body fluids or from touching surfaces infected with the virus.

The health agency warns that older adults with existing health conditions are at increased risk of severe disease.

Signs of the virus include a high body temperature, coughing and difficulty breathing. Severe cases can cause **pneumonia**, kidney failure and even death. Although the virus has been identified, a vaccine is not likely to be available soon.

Masks in high demand

Demand for protective **masks** is up all over Asia because of concerns about the spread of the new virus in China. Now, wearing facial masks is becoming the "new normal" in the area.

Face masks and hand-**sanitizing** liquids are among the most popular products. Factories are rushing to increase production as the number of infections continues to climb.

In some parts of Asia, wearing protective masks has become required. One drugstore in Bangkok, Thailand, reports a huge sales increase. Shortages also have been reported in South Korea.

Mario Ritter Jr. adapted this story for VOA Learning English from reports from The Associated Press, Reuters and VOA News. Hai Do was the editor.

