

# Special Report

## COVID-19 (New Coronavirus)

**Update: 27 February 2020**

An outbreak of viral pneumonia – identified as a new strain of coronavirus (in the same family as SARS and MERS) - COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) originated in the Chinese city of Wuhan, Hubei Province in December 2019. The virus has since spread to all provinces in China and now into 50 countries. As of 27 February 2020, there are over **82,500 confirmed cases**, including **over 2,800 deaths**.

While **mainland China accounts for 95% of the total cases**, several countries have seen sustained local transmission and new cases are now occurring outside of China more rapidly than within China: **South Korea, Italy, Japan and Iran** have confirmed more than 180 cases. Transmission on **cruise ships** has also accounted for approximately 700 cases.

Elsewhere, cases have been confirmed in: **Afghanistan, Algeria, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Lebanon, Macao, Malaysia, Nepal, North Macedonia, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Philippines, Romania, Russia, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States** and Vietnam.

Johns Hopkins' Center for Systems Science and Engineering provides a current [map of COVID-19](#) cases throughout the world.

### LOCAL RESPONSES

#### Local Containment Measures

**China:** Chinese officials have set parameters to contain the outbreak, including quarantine of several cities in Hubei Province and mandatory use of face masks in public. However, there are indications that local governments have been given relative autonomy to implement measures to contain the virus. As such, restrictions on transportation, public venues and work policies may vary across China.

**South Korea:** All residents in (and current visitors to) Daegu have been asked to stay at home for at least two weeks. Nationwide, the public has been asked to refrain from participating in events attended by large groups of people. Ninety-one hospitals nationwide have been designated as “public relief” hospitals where all respiratory symptomatic cases are being managed in a separate area of the hospital from all other patients.

**Japan:** Schools have been closed for Spring Break.

**Italy:** In the North of the country, the worst hit area, several towns are in quarantine and large-scale events such as soccer matches are being cancelled.

**Iran:** Congregations and mass gatherings such as Friday prayers are being cancelled in most cities nationwide; entry restrictions on Chinese citizens are in place as well.

**Other countries:** Measures include short-term school closures, suspension of large group gatherings, entry restrictions for visitors with recent travel history to worst affected regions globally, and encouragement to contain local movement.

Due to the fast-evolving nature of this situation it is recommended to seek guidance from local authorities for up-to-date information.

### Impact on Local Health Care

With the influx of patients with respiratory symptoms, several cities in China are struggling to keep up with the demand for health care. Reports from those areas have noted that there are shortages of medical supplies, equipment and qualified staff. Chinese authorities have deployed military clinicians to impacted areas to provide support and additional hospital infrastructure has been built to specifically accommodate COVID-19 patients.

It is important that expatriates and travelers factor in the potential lack of health care resources available in the affected regions in order to address and manage any non-COVID-19 health care concerns they may have.

### GLOBAL TRAVEL GUIDELINES

On February 2<sup>nd</sup>, the **U.S. Department of State** updated its advisory to "*Level 4: Do not travel*", while the **U.K. Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO)** continues to advise "*against all travel to Hubei Province due to the ongoing novel coronavirus outbreak. The FCO advise against all but essential travel to the rest of mainland China (not including Hong Kong and Macao)*"

On 26 February, the U.S. Department of State escalated its Travel Advisory for South Korea and Mongolia to "*Level 3: Reconsider Travel.*" The change in the advice for South Korea is related to the country's high number of cases, whereas the change for Mongolia is a response to the country's implementation of significant transportation restrictions in reaction to the outbreak, though there are no confirmed cases yet in Mongolia.

The **U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** has also issued the following travel guidelines in response to the outbreak:

- **China and South Korea** – *Warning Level 3: Avoid Nonessential Travel*
- **Japan, Iran and Italy** – *Warning Level 2: Practice Enhanced Precautions*
- **Hong Kong** – *Warning Level 1: Practice Usual Precautions*
- *CDC recommends that all travelers **reconsider cruise ship voyages to or within Asia.***

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** has not declared any travel restrictions but has provided [advice for travel](#) during the outbreak. In addition, WHO escalated the virus outbreak to a [Public Health Emergency of International Concern \(PHEIC\)](#), signaling the

international community to increase its preparedness and allowing the agency to provide greater support to nations with less capable health systems.

### Commercial Air Travel

Outbound flights from China and other significantly impacted countries such as South Korea are subject to additional inspection in the form of health screenings and temperature checks, as well as quarantine of suspected cases. These measures have already been implemented in multiple countries as the outbreak spreads. Several major airlines such as [British Airways](#), [Lufthansa](#), [Delta](#), [United](#) and [American Airlines](#) announced the suspension of flights to China to help contain the spread of the outbreak.

Several countries have closed or significantly reduced cross border traffic:

- Although the United States has announced that the risk to the American public is low, on 2<sup>nd</sup> February, a temporary entry restriction went into place for all foreign nationals with recent travel to China within the past 14 days. This restriction excludes permanent residents, their immediate family members and those of U.S. citizens. U.S. citizens returning from Hubei Province within 14 days prior to entry into the U.S. will be placed on a mandatory quarantine upon return. Moreover, U.S. citizens returning from the rest of mainland China will be subject to a proactive health screening, and monitored self-quarantine for up to 14 days.
- [Singapore](#) has restricted entry for all new visitors with recent (last 14 days) travel history to China to enter or transit in the country - as well as to PRC passport holders.
- Countries adjacent to China are also taking precautions to halt the spread of the outbreak. While Russia and Mongolia have announced land border closures, the government in Hong Kong has announced plans to halt all cross-border rail and ferry services as well as reduce the number of flights to mainland cities by half.
- Pakistan and Turkey have now closed land borders with Iran due to the recent increase of confirmed cases in an attempt to reduce further global spread.

### Air Medical Transport

**Conditions non-related to the virus:** Patients being transported out of areas impacted by the new virus by air ambulance may be required to show a certificate indicating that they are not positive. This requirement may extend to other countries.

**The medical transport of any potential COVID-19 cases (confirmed or case contact)** will require following the transport guidelines from the US CDC established for MERS and SARS. To consider:

- All transports must be cleared by health authorities in all countries impacted by the transport in order to limit the virus from spreading to additional regions;
- All healthcare professionals involved in the transports must be fully trained to specific disease protocols;
- The transport will require the use of a bio-containment unit. UnitedHealthcare Global partners with several air ambulances that are currently able to transport such patients.

Commercial flights **should never** be considered for potential COVID-19 patients.

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## THE NEW CORONAVIRUS

### COVID-19 Illness

The illness may vary in severity (mild, moderate to severe) and symptoms may include **fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, myalgia or fatigue**. According to the U.S. CDC, the symptoms “*may appear in as few as 2 days or as long as 14 after exposure*”. Human-to-human transmission has been confirmed. Recent travelers from the area experiencing fever or respiratory symptoms are advised to seek medical attention immediately.

### Prevention

The U.S. CDC recommends the following to reduce the risk of infection and spread:

- *"Avoid close contact with people who are sick.*
- *Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.*
- *Stay home when you are sick.*
- *Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.*
- *Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.*
- *Follow CDC's recommendations for using facemask. (see face mask section below)*
- *Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.*
- *If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty."*

### Face Masks

Chinese authorities are requiring people to wear face masks in public.

Anyone regularly exposed to someone with a confirmed infection and those who are coughing should wear a mask to limit spread. There is now a critical shortage of these supplies.

The US CDC suggests the following regarding the use of face masks:

- *"CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear facemask to protect themselves from respiratory viruses, including COVID-19.*
- *Facemask should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19, in order to protect others from the risk of getting infected. The use of facemasks is also crucial for health workers and people who are taking care of someone in close settings (at home or in a health care facility)."*

### Vaccine

There are currently no vaccines available.

### Testing

Testing for patients for COVID-19 is very limited. There are no commercial tests currently available. National health authorities are defining who will be tested and are usually limiting the testing to patients who are symptomatic with recent travel history to affected areas or possible exposure by contact.

### Symptoms and Monitoring

Following possible exposure, monitor your health starting from the day you may have been exposed to the virus and continue for 14 days after the last possible exposure. Watch for these signs and symptoms:

- Fever (above 37.5C / 99.5F) - Take your temperature twice a day
- Coughing
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Myalgia or fatigue

Sore throat also has been reported in some patients early in the clinical course. Symptoms that have been reported less commonly include headache, sputum production, diarrhea, nausea and hemoptysis. Some people have experienced gastrointestinal symptoms such as diarrhea and nausea prior to developing fever and lower respiratory tract symptoms.

The severity of the disease varies from being asymptomatic or having a mild illness to developing severe illness, which in some cases can result in death. Possible risk factors for developing more severe disease include older age, pregnancy and having underlying health conditions.

### REFERENCES

#### Situation Updates

[WHO Situation Update](#)  
[US CDC – China Summary](#)  
[US CDC – COVID-19 Outbreak](#)  
[Johns Hopkins CSSE Map](#)  
[European CDC](#)  
[WHO – Situation Reports](#)

#### COVID-19

[US CDC – Coronavirus information](#)  
[WHO – Novel Coronavirus page](#)

#### Travel Advice & Limitations

[WHO – Travel Advice](#)  
[US CDC – Information for Travelers](#)  
[US State Department](#)  
[British Foreign Office](#)  
[Australian Department of Foreign Affairs](#)  
[Hong Kong Special Administrative Region](#)  
[Singapore Ministry of Health](#)

#### Questions?

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