

Beijing's Forbidden City to close over virus fears

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China will close Beijing's Forbidden City—one of the country's most revered cultural sites—due to rising fears over a new SARS-like virus that has infected hundreds and killed more than a dozen.

The sprawling imperial palace will close on Saturday until further notice to "avoid cross-infection caused by the gathering of people," it said in an online statement.

The move comes as Chinese authorities lock down some 20 million people in central China at the epicentre of a deadly virus outbreak, banning planes and trains from leaving in an unprecedented move aimed at containing the disease, which has already spread to other countries.

The respiratory virus has claimed 17 lives since emerging from a seafood and animal market in the [city](#) of Wuhan, infected over 500 people nationwide and been detected as far away as the United States.

Beijing's Forbidden City—which saw 19 million visitors last year—is usually packed with tourists during the Lunar New Year festival, when hundreds of millions of people travel across China.

Although there have only been more 14 confirmed cases of people infected with the virus so far in Beijing, city authorities have cancelled large-scaled Lunar New Year events this week as part of national efforts to control the spread of the Wuhan virus.

The city government said it would call off events including temple fairs—which have attracted massive crowds of tourists in past years—urging citizens "to strengthen prevention and support".

In a post on China's Twitter-like platform Weibo, city authorities added that the move was to help epidemic prevention and control.

Beijing's city government said they would provide more information "as the epidemic situation evolves."

The central city of Wuhan, where the [virus](#) emerged, was put on lockdown Thursday, with outbound trains and planes indefinitely suspended. Tollways on roads out of the city were closed as well.

Neighbouring Huanggang announced that [public transport](#) and [rail services](#) would be suspended at midnight, while a train station was to be closed in a third city, Ezhou.

Beijing Tourism Net, which is regulated by the city's Bureau of Culture and Tourism, added in a separate Weibo post that the Beijing Ditan and Longtan Temple Fairs—originally scheduled for January 25 to 29—would be cancelled.

The fairs, which have been held for roughly three decades according to Chinese news outlet Xinhua, saw 1.4 million Chinese and foreign tourists over five days last year.

Beijing Tourism Net added the Tanzhe Temple Scenic Area, Jietai Temple Scenic Area, and Miaofeng Mountain Scenic Area in Mentougou District would also be closed.

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