

# US announces 14-day quarantine on 195 virus evacuees

January 31 2020

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The US on Friday issued a rare federal quarantine order of 14 days for 195 Americans who were evacuated from the Chinese city at the center of a deadly global virus epidemic.

It came after one of the individuals tried to leave the California military base where the repatriated citizens landed on a chartered flight on Wednesday, and is the first directive of its kind in over 50 years.

The US has told its citizens to avoid China after the World Health Organization declared a global coronavirus emergency. The Chinese death toll rose Friday to 213 and total infections surpassed the SARS epidemic of two decades ago.

"This legal order is part of an aggressive public health response, the goal of which is to prevent as much as possible community spread of this novel virus in the United States," said Nancy Messonnier, a senior official with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

"Our goal today, tomorrow and always continues to be the safety of the American public," she added. "We would rather be remembered for overreacting than underreacting."

A plane carrying the repatriated citizens, who include diplomats and their families, touched down at the March Air Reserve Base in Riverside, California, two days ago and officials initially said the passengers would be asked to voluntarily isolate themselves for up to 72

hours.

Early signs were good, and the CDC declared that none of the individuals showed symptoms of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus.

They submitted samples for testing at the CDC headquarters in Atlanta. Not all of the results are back yet, but even a negative result does not necessarily mean a person is out of danger, added Messonnier.

## **'Do not panic'**

One of the individuals tried to leave the base and was placed under quarantine by the state of California, said a second CDC official, Marty Citron, but he denied that the decision to enforce a federal order was linked to this event.

The CDC said a quarantine order is for people who have been exposed to a disease but are not yet sick.

"The last time that quarantine was used for a suspect case was in the 1960s for smallpox evaluation," said Citron.

Messonier emphasized that despite the seemingly drastic actions, the US public "should not let fear or panic guide your actions" but instead exercise normal precautions for stopping the spread of respiratory viruses.

These include washing your hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds, disinfecting surfaces, and staying home when sick, and covering your cough or sneeze with a tissue then throwing it in the trash.

"We do not currently recommend the use of facemasks for the general American public," said Messonnier. "This virus is not spreading in your

communities."

"Please do not assume that just because someone is of Asian descent that they have this new coronavirus," she added, noting there are four million Chinese Americans in the US.

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