

# Deadliest day for China in virus fight as global fears mount

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Medical staff in protective clothing carry a suspected virus patient from an apartment in Wuhan

China reported its biggest single-day jump in novel coronavirus deaths on Thursday, as global fears deepened with more infections confirmed

overseas including three Japanese evacuated from the outbreak's epicentre.

The World Health Organization, which initially downplayed a disease that has now killed 170 in China, was readying to meet Thursday to decide whether to declare it a global emergency.

But governments, companies and people around the world were already escalating efforts to contain the illness, which is believed to have emerged from an animal market in the central Chinese city of Wuhan.

Many countries have urged their citizens not to visit China, while some have banned entry for travellers from Wuhan.

At least 15 countries have confirmed infections.

The US reported its first case of a person catching the virus from another person on American soil—a man in Chicago who contracted the illness from his wife who had travelled to Wuhan.

Airlines began cancelling flights servicing China on Wednesday, and more followed suit on Thursday.

Israel barred all flights from China, while Russia said it was closing its far eastern border with China over the outbreak.

More than 6,000 tourists were put under lockdown aboard a cruise ship at an Italian port after two Chinese passengers were isolated over fears they could be carrying the coronavirus.

## The spread of the coronavirus

Confirmed cases of 2019 nCoV as of January 30, 0400 GMT



Map showing countries and territories where cases of the China virus have been confirmed, as of January 30

Beijing has taken extreme steps to arrest the spread of the virus, including effectively quarantining more than 50 million people in Wuhan and surrounding Hubei province.

The government on Thursday reported 38 new deaths in the preceding 24 hours, the highest one-day total since the virus was detected late last year.

All but one of the new deaths were in Hubei.

The number of confirmed new cases also grew steadily to 7,711, the National Health Commission said. Another 81,000 people were under observation for possible infection.

The pathogen is believed to have emerged in a market that sold wild game, and spread by a Lunar New Year holiday season in which hundreds of millions of Chinese travel domestically or abroad.

## 'Truly new situation'

Thousands of foreigners have been trapped in Wuhan since it was sealed off last week.



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Beijing and Shanghai were quiet as countless people followed advice to stay indoors, or at least wear masks when venturing out.

Japan and the United States on Wednesday became the first countries to organise airlifts from Wuhan for their citizens. A second US flight is planned in the coming days.

Britain was planning an evacuation of around 200 of its citizens early Friday morning, after receiving the necessary clearance from Beijing.

Australia and New Zealand were among others organising similar operations.

Tokyo on Thursday reported that three people who were aboard the first evacuation flight had tested positive for the virus after landing back in Japan.

Two of the three infected passengers showed no symptoms, underscoring the difficulty detecting the coronavirus.

Compounding fears, Japan was allowing the arrivals—more than 400 have been repatriated after a second flight on Thursday—to "self-quarantine".



A sign in various languages, including Chinese, tells customers that masks have sold out at a pharmacy in Rome

The government said it could not legally compel testing or quarantining, and two people on the first flight refused testing.

That is despite Japanese officials already confirming two cases in which patients tested positive without having visited China.

In contrast, other countries organising evacuations said they were all planning to quarantine.

## Take action

The WHO also has come under fire after it last week decided not to declare a global health emergency.

A meeting Thursday will decide whether to reverse that decision, possibly leading to travel or trade barriers.

"The whole world needs to take action," Michael Ryan, head of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, told reporters in Geneva.

The virus is similar to the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) pathogen. That outbreak also began in China and eventually killed nearly 800 people worldwide in 2002-03.



The flight crew of the chartered Scoot airline that flew to Wuhan to evacuate Singaporean nationals, arrives at Changi international airport on Singapore

Major airlines that have suspended or reduced service to China include British Airways, German flag carrier Lufthansa, American Airlines, KLM, and United.

Chinese efforts to halt the virus have included the suspension of classes nationwide and an extension of the Lunar New Year holiday.

All football matches across the country also would be postponed, the Chinese Football Association said, including the top-tier Chinese Super League.

## **Economic worries**

World stock markets tumbled again Thursday on fears that trouble in the "world's factory" would upset global supply chains and dent profits.

Toyota, IKEA, Starbucks, Tesla, McDonald's and tech giant Foxconn were among the corporate giants temporarily freezing production or closing large numbers of outlets in China.

Volkswagen announced Thursday its China joint-venture plants would not start production again before February 9.





Ambulances arrive at Haneda airport in Tokyo to meet a second charter flight carrying Japanese citizens from the Chinese city of Wuhan

US Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said the coronavirus posed a fresh risk to the world economy.

Throughout China, signs of paranoia multiplied, with residents of some Beijing residential compounds erecting makeshift barriers to their premises.

In one of many similar photos posted online, a man wearing a surgical mask and brandishing a traditional martial arts weapon squatted on a barricade outside a Chinese village, near a sign saying: "Outsiders forbidden from entering".

The crisis has caused food prices to spike, and the central government on Thursday blamed this partly on overzealous preventive measures, issuing a directive banning any roadblocks or other hindrances to food shipments.

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