

US, others prepare evacuations as virus spreads from China

January 28 2020, by Joe McDonald



Passengers wear protective face masks arrive at the high speed train station in Hong Kong, Tuesday, Jan. 28, 2020. Hong Kong's leader has announced that all rail links to mainland China will be cut starting Friday as fears grow about the spread of a new virus. (AP Photo/Vincent Yu)

The United States and several other nations prepared Tuesday to airlift

citizens out of a Chinese city at the center of a virus outbreak that has killed more than 100 people.

Hong Kong's leader said it will cut all rail links to mainland China and halve the number of flights as authorities in China and overseas sought to stem the spread of the new virus. The number of confirmed cases rose to more than 4,500.

The U.S. government chartered a plane to fly out diplomats from the U.S. Consulate in Wuhan, where the outbreak started, and other Americans. The plane will make a refueling stop in Alaska before flying on to Ontario, California, the U.S. Embassy said.

A Japanese-chartered Boeing 767 departed for Wuhan to fly out its citizens, the first of two possible flights, and South Korea also said it will send a plane to the city in central China. France, Mongolia and other governments also planned evacuations.

China has cut off access to Wuhan and 16 other cities in Hubei province to prevent people from leaving and spreading the virus further. The lockdown has trapped more than 50 million people in the most far-reaching disease control measures ever imposed.

The Japanese flight was bringing 20,000 face masks as well as protective gear, all in short supply as hospitals grapple with a growing number of patients. The city is building two hospitals in a matter of days to add more than 2,000 beds.



People wear face masks as they shop for produce at a supermarket in Beijing, Tuesday, Jan. 28, 2020. China's death toll from a new viral disease that is causing mounting global concern rose by 25 to at least 106 on Tuesday as the United States and other governments prepared to fly their citizens out of the locked-down city at center of the outbreak. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)

U.S. health officials expanded their recommendation for people to avoid non-essential travel to any part of China, rather than just Wuhan and other areas most affected by the outbreak.

Asian stock markets tumbled for a second day, dragged down by worries about the virus's global economic impact.

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam, wearing a green surgical mask, told a

news conference that train service would stop at midnight Thursday and that the two stations connecting to the mainland would be closed.

She stopped short of a total closing of the border, as North Korea and Mongolia have done, but said ferry and bus service to the mainland would also be suspended.

China's death toll from the new viral disease rose to 106, including the first death in Beijing, the Chinese capital, and 24 others in Hubei province, where the first illnesses were detected in December.



A government worker sprays disinfectant on a residential building in Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province, Tuesday, Jan. 28, 2020. Hong Kong's leader announced Tuesday that all rail links to mainland China will be cut starting Friday as fears grow about the spread of a new virus. (Chinatopix via AP)

There were 1,771 new cases confirmed in China, raising the national total to 4,515, according to the National Health Commission. It said 976 people were in serious condition.

The sharp rise in infections in recent days suggests there has been significant human-to-human spread of the virus, though it could also be explained by expanded monitoring efforts, said Malik Peiris, chair in virology at the University of Hong Kong.

Experts worry that the new virus may spread more easily than originally thought, or may have mutated into a form that does so. It is from the coronavirus family, which also can cause the common cold as well as more serious illnesses such as SARS.

Peiris, an adviser on the World Health Organization's coronavirus emergency committee, said it is reassuring that outside of China the disease has not spread widely beyond the people who brought it from Wuhan.



Students line up to sanitize their hands to avoid the contact of coronavirus before their morning class at a high school in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Tuesday, Jan. 28, 2020. China on Tuesday reported 25 more deaths from a new viral disease, as the U.S. government prepared to fly Americans out of the city at the center of the outbreak. (AP Photo/Heng Sinith)

China has reported eight cases in Hong Kong and five in Macao, and more than 45 cases have been confirmed elsewhere in the world. Almost all involve mainland Chinese tourists or people who visited Wuhan.

Thailand reported six members of a family from Hubei were new cases, raising its total to 14. Taiwan confirmed three new cases Tuesday, including two 70-year-old tourists from Wuhan, raising its total to eight.

Infections also have been confirmed in the United States, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Nepal, France, Germany, Canada, Australia and Sri Lanka.

The five American cases—two in southern California and one each in Washington state, Chicago and Arizona—are people who had recently arrived from central China.

The Chinese government has sent 6,000 extra medical workers to Wuhan from across China, including 1,800 who were due to arrive Tuesday, a commission official, Jiao Yahui, said at a news conference.



People wear masks at a metro station in Taipei, Taiwan, Tuesday, Jan. 28, 2020. According to the Taiwan Centers of Disease Control (CDC) Tuesday, the eighth case diagnosed with the 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) has been confirmed in Taiwan. (AP Photo/Chiang Ying-ying)

A baby boy was delivered by surgery in Wuhan after his 27-year-old mother was hospitalized as a "highly suspected" virus case, state TV reported. The mother, who has a fever and cough, was 37 weeks pregnant, or two weeks less than a standard full term.

Doctors wore protective masks and clothing for the delivery Friday at Union Hospital.

"It was unlikely for her to be able to give natural birth," said the hospital's deputy director of obstetrics, Zhao Yin. "After the baby was born, the mother would suffer less pressure in her lungs and she could get better treatment."

In Beijing, residents of two villages in the capital's eastern Pinggu district were refusing to allow outsiders to enter in an effort to avoid the virus.

"The village has been locked down," a member of the Beitumen village committee who would give only his surname, Guo, said by telephone. He said villagers are allowed to go out to buy daily necessities.



In this photo released by China's Xinhua News Agency, a pilot wearing a protective suit parks a cargo plane at Wuhan Tianhe International Airport in Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province, Tuesday, Jan. 28, 2020. Hong Kong's leader announced Tuesday that all rail links to mainland China will be cut starting Friday as fears grow about the spread of a new virus. (Cheng Min/Xinhua via AP)

Another village, Jingyu, imposed similar restrictions, said a member of the local committee who wouldn't give his name.

The Education Ministry canceled English proficiency and other tests for students to apply to foreign universities. The ministry said the new semester for public schools and universities following the Lunar New Year was postponed until further notice.

Hong Kong announced postal services and most government offices would stay closed through at least next week. The education department said schools would reopen on Feb. 17.

Chinese financial markets were closed for the holiday, but stock indexes in Tokyo, Seoul and Sydney all declined.

Beijing's official response has "vastly improved" since the 2002-03 SARS outbreak, which also originated in China, but "fears of a global contagion are not put to bed," said Vishnu Varathan at Mizuho Bank in Singapore.



Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam wears a protective face mask speaks during a press conference held in Hong Kong, Tuesday, Jan. 28, 2020. Hong Kong's leader has announced that all rail links to mainland China will be cut

starting Friday as fears grow about the spread of a new virus. (AP Photo/Vincent Yu)



In this photo released by China's Xinhua News Agency, a worker wearing a face mask unloads medical supplies from a cargo plane at Wuhan Tianhe International Airport in Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province, Tuesday, Jan. 28, 2020. Hong Kong's leader announced Tuesday that all rail links to mainland China will be cut starting Friday as fears grow about the spread of a new virus. (Cheng Min/Xinhua via AP)



People wear masks on a bus in Quang Ninh province, Vietnam Tuesday, Jan. 28, 2018. China on Tuesday reported 25 more deaths from a new viral disease, as the U.S. government prepared to fly Americans out of the city at the center of the outbreak. (AP Photo/Hau Dinh)



People wear masks at Ginza shopping district in Tokyo, Tuesday, Jan. 28, 2020. China has confirmed more than 4,500 cases of a new virus. Most have been in the central city of Wuhan where the outbreak began in December. More than 45 cases have been confirmed in other places with nearly all of them involving Chinese tourists or people who visited Wuhan recently. (AP Photo/Koji Sasahara)



In this photo released by China's Xinhua News Agency, a medical staff member wearing protective a suit works in the department of infectious diseases at Wuhan Union Hospital in Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province, Tuesday, Jan. 28, 2020. Hong Kong's leader announced Tuesday that all rail links to mainland China will be cut starting Friday as fears grow about the spread of a new virus. (Xiao Yijiu/Xinhua via AP)



People wear masks in Hong Kong, Tuesday, Jan. 28, 2020. China has confirmed more than 4,500 cases of a new virus. Most have been in the central city of Wuhan where the outbreak began in December. More than 45 cases have been confirmed in other places with nearly all of them involving Chinese tourists or people who visited Wuhan recently. (AP Photo/Achmad Ibrahim)



In this photo provided by South Korea Presidential Blue House via Yonhap News Agency, South Korean President Moon Jae-in, right, wearing a mask arrives to inspect the National Medical Center in Seoul, South Korea, Tuesday, Jan. 28, 2020. Moon on Tuesday visited the medical center in Seoul amid the outbreak of the new coronavirus. (South Korea Presidential Blue House/Yonhap via AP)



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People wear face masks as they shop for groceries at a supermarket in Beijing, Tuesday, Jan. 28, 2020. China's death toll from a new viral disease that is causing mounting global concern rose by 25 to at least 106 on Tuesday as the United States and other governments prepared to fly their citizens out of the locked-down city at center of the outbreak. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)

Airlines, resorts and other companies that rely on travel and tourism suffered steep losses. Prices of gold and bonds rose as traders moved money into safe haven holdings.

The Shanghai Stock Exchange, one of the world's busiest, announced it was postponing the resumption of trading after the holiday by three days to Monday.

The new virus causes cold- and flu-like symptoms, including cough and fever, and in more severe cases, shortness of breath and pneumonia.

The virus is thought to have spread to people from wild animals sold at a Wuhan market. China on Sunday banned trade in wild animals and urged people to stop eating meat from them.

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