

Germany urges citizens to avoid 'unnecessary trips' to virus-hit China

January 27 2020

Germany urged its citizens on Monday to avoid "unnecessary trips" to China amid fears over the rapid spread of a deadly virus.

Berlin also said it was considering evacuating citizens from Wuhan, the city at the centre of the outbreak.

"Travellers should consider delaying or cancelling any unnecessary trips to China," Foreign Minister Heiko Maas told a press conference in the capital.

Maas added that the government was "considering a possible evacuation of all willing German citizens" from Wuhan, in Hubei province where the coronavirus first emerged.

The number of German citizens currently in the city was estimated to be "in double figures", he said.

The respiratory virus has infected thousands and killed 81 since it was discovered in Wuhan last December.

The Chinese government has sealed off Wuhan and neighbouring cities, effectively trapping tens of millions of people—including thousands of foreigners—in a bid to contain the spread of the virus.

Its ability to spread appears to be "getting stronger" though it is "not as powerful as SARS", top Chinese health officials said.

Both France and the United States have announced flights to evacuate personnel and citizens trapped at the epicentre of the outbreak.

Germany is yet to record a confirmed case of the coronavirus on its soil, though local media have reported several suspected cases.

Maas said the German government was holding crisis talks with health experts to discuss the epidemic.

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Citation: Germany urges citizens to avoid 'unnecessary trips' to virus-hit China (2020, January 27) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-01-germany-urges-citizens-unnecessary-virus-hit.html>

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