

UK steps up checks on flights from China virus centre

January 22 2020

Britain on Wednesday enhanced monitoring of flights from the central China city at the heart of a new SARS-like virus that has killed nine people and spread to the United States.

Public Health England also raised the risk level of an infection from "very low" to "low" because of the potential for human-to-human transmission.

"From today, enhanced monitoring will be in place for all direct flights from Wuhan to the UK," the [health](#) service said in a statement.

Health teams will meet each of the three weekly direct flights from Wuhan to London "to provide advice and support to those that feel unwell", it said.

Mandarin and Cantonese language-speaking staff will also be on hand. The statement said the measures could be expanded to "other Chinese departure points if necessary".

The coronavirus has caused alarm because of its similarity to SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), which killed nearly 650 people across mainland China and Hong Kong in 2002-03.

The new virus is known to have infected hundreds, although doctors fear its true scale could be higher.

The United States on Tuesday confirmed its first case of a person with the new virus. European countries have registered no cases to date.

London's Heathrow [airport](#), which is Europe's busiest, said the stepped-up checks were "a precaution".

"We would like to reassure passengers that the government assesses the risk of a traveller contracting coronavirus to be low," a Heathrow spokesperson said.

Romanian health authorities on Wednesday also said they intend to introduce screening measures at airports.

Elsewhere in Europe, Italy's [health ministry](#) said it would introduce temperature checks for passengers arriving on the next scheduled direct arrival from Wuhan to Rome's Fiumicino airport.

The airport has three direct flights a week with Wuhan.

French Health Minister Agnes Buzyn said authorities were monitoring the situation but not following the lead of nations such as Russia, which has put up posters telling passengers what to do in case of symptoms.

Such measures are not recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), Buzyn said, and are "not very effective".

A WHO spokesman said Tuesday that "based on currently available information, there is no justification for any restriction of travel or trade".

German health authorities said they had also refrained from taking any measures at airports.

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