Australia to refuse entry to non-citizens arriving from China

February 1 2020

Prime Minister Scott Morrison has said only 'Australian citizens, Australian residents, dependents, legal guardians or spouses' will be permitted into the country from mainland China from Saturday

The Australian government on Saturday said it would bar non-citizens arriving from mainland China from entering the country under new

measures to combat the spread of the coronavirus epidemic.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said only "Australian citizens, Australian residents, dependents, legal guardians or spouses" would be permitted into the country from mainland China from Saturday.

"The arrangements are being put in place through our border authorities to ensure that that can be actioned," he added.

Border control authorities would be able to "step up" processes in the next 24 hours to screen those who had departed or transited through China, Morrison said.

Exceptions will be made for airline crew "using appropriate personal protective equipment".

"We're in fact operating with an abundance of caution in these circumstances. So Australians can go about their daily lives with confidence," Morrison told reporters.

"We're acting here in advance of many countries in terms of when similar types of arrangements are being put in place."

The requirement of people arriving in Australia from Hubei province to "self-isolate" for 14 days was expanded from Saturday to include anyone travelling from mainland China.

Australia's foreign ministry also updated its travel advice for mainland China to "do not travel".

The ministry said the temporary measures do not apply to Hong Kong, and that they will be reviewed in two weeks.

Qantas Airways, Australia's flag carrier, said earlier Saturday it would suspend its two direct flights to mainland China—Sydney to Beijing and Shanghai—from February 9 because of various virus-linked international restrictions.

Air New Zealand followed suit, announcing a suspension of its Auckland-Shanghai service from February 9.

Australian officials have confirmed 10 cases of coronavirus in the country so far.

Foreign Minister Marise Payne said plans to evacuate Australian citizens from the epicentre of the outbreak in Wuhan to facilities on Christmas Island to be "agreed soon".

It is not clear how many people have requested "assisted departure" but Morrison defended the Christmas Island facilities, typically used for detaining refugees.

Canberra said it will make available 500,000 masks to airport staff and arriving passengers.

"There is no basis for alarm. It is important to remember the risk to Australians is currently very low. We need to keep it that way," the prime minister said later in a joint statement with the health and foreign ministry.

Any non-citizens that arrive from Saturday "will be subject to mandatory quarantine" should they not agree to return to their "port of origin".

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