

China scrambles to find beds for virus patients as deaths hit 563

February 6 2020, by Helen Roxburgh



Medical staff set up beds for patients displaying mild symptoms of the coronavirus at an exhibition centre converted into a hospital in Wuhan in China

China scrambled to find bed space for thousands of newly infected patients on Thursday, as the death toll from the novel coronavirus soared

to 563.

More than 28,000 people are now known to be infected nationwide in the outbreak that has spiralled into a global health emergency.

Two dozen countries now have confirmed cases of the coronavirus that emerged from a market selling [exotic animals](#) at the end of last year.

On Thursday, thousands of people were stranded aboard two cruise ships in Asia, with tests finding that 20 people had contracted the virus in one of the vessels.

At the Chinese epicentre of the epidemic in Hubei province, the locked-down city of Wuhan was due to open a second field hospital, offering 1,600 beds.

The first hospital, with 1,000 beds, opened earlier this week, and authorities said they were converting [public buildings](#) into temporary medical facilities to deal with the influx of sick people.

The city of 11 million is facing a "severe" lack of beds, said Hu Lishan, a senior official in Wuhan, noting that there were 8,182 patients admitted to 28 hospitals that have a total of 8,254 beds.

There is also a shortage of equipment and materials, Hu told reporters.



There is huge demand for facemasks all over Asia

The central government has announced measures intended to ensure the supply of vital medical resources, with tax breaks for manufacturers of equipment needed to fight the epidemic.

"We must make all-out efforts across the country to meet the need for essential medical supplies and medical professionals in Hubei Province," Premier Li Keqiang said, according to the official Xinhua news agency.

BGI Group, a genome sequencing company based in southern China, said it opened on Wednesday a lab in Wuhan able to test up to 10,000 people per day for the virus.

Cities hunker down

Tens of millions of people in Hubei and surrounding provinces are now facing swingeing restrictions on their movement as authorities try to slow the spread of the virus.

They include residents of Hangzhou, a city just 175 kilometres (110 miles) from Shanghai, where fences block streets and loudspeakers tell people: "Don't go out!"



A usually bustling Beijing is eerily quiet, with businesses closed and people hunkering down to avoid the new virus

In some cities, even in the far north of the country, inhabitants are being offered cash rewards to inform on people who come from Hubei.

In Beijing—where streets remain eerily quiet and businesses are shuttered—restaurants have been barred from accepting reservations for parties.

In Nanchang, the capital of Jiangxi province which borders Hubei, pharmacists must send reports to the authorities on anyone buying fever or cough medicine. The city has also limited the number of outings per family.

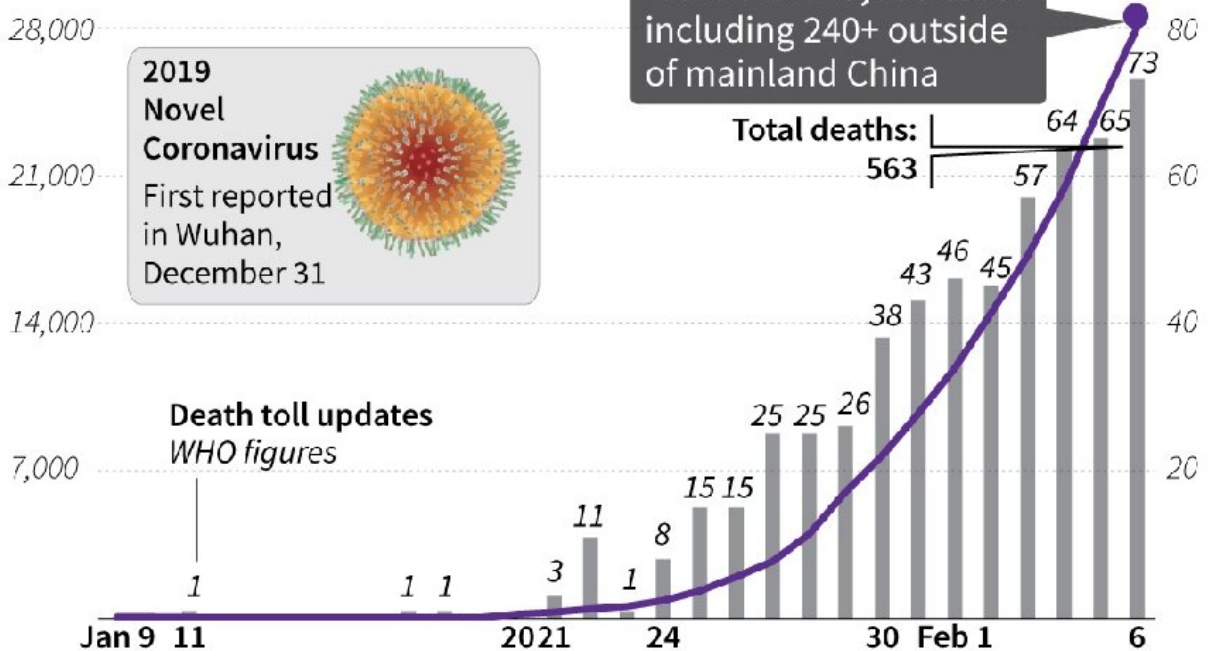
Cruise ship infections

While the [death toll](#) continues to rise, and now includes two people outside mainland China, health experts have stressed that at two percent, 2019-nCoV is far less deadly than the SARS pathogen, which is from the same coronavirus family and killed around 10 percent of the people it infected during a 2002-3 outbreak.

The global spread of the coronavirus

Confirmed cases of 2019-nCoV as of February 6, at 02:00 GMT

Confirmed cases



Countries and territories

Outside mainland China

Australia	14	Germany	12	Nepal	1	Sweden	1
Belgium	1	Hong Kong	21	Philippines	3	Taiwan	11
Britain	2	India	3	Russia	2	Thailand	25
Cambodia	1	Italy	2	Singapore	28	UAE	5
Canada	4	Japan	33	S. Korea	19	US	12
Finland	1	Macau	10	Spain	1		
France	6	Malaysia	12	Sri Lanka	1		

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A usually bustling Beijing is eerily quiet, with businesses closed and people hunkering down to avoid the new virus

But panic has risen worldwide with countries barring arrivals from China and governments warning against travel to the country, while airlines have halted flights.

At least 20 people on one [cruise ship](#) off the Japanese coast have tested positive for the new coronavirus, with thousands more staring at a two-week seaborne isolation.

In Hong Kong, 3,600 passengers and crew spent the night marooned on the cruise ship World Dream as authorities conducted health checks after three former passengers tested positive for the virus.



More than 3,700 people were on a cruise ship when it was quarantined off the Japanese coast

Italy announced that passengers on every international flight would be scanned for fever.

The World Health Organization, which has declared a global health emergency, has called for \$675 million to fight the novel coronavirus.

"Our message to the international community is invest today or pay more later," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said, adding that the funding appeal was "much less than the bill we will have to pay if we do not invest in preparedness now".

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Citation: China scrambles to find beds for virus patients as deaths hit 563 (2020, February 6)
retrieved 27 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-02-china-scrambles-beds-virus-patients.html>

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