

China's virus death toll spikes, more than SARS

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China's death toll from a new coronavirus jumped above 360 on Monday to surpass the number of fatalities of its SARS crisis two decades ago, with dozens of people dying in the epicentre's quarantined ground-zero.

The 57 confirmed new deaths was the single-biggest increase since the virus was detected late last year in the central city of Wuhan, where it is believed to have jumped from animals at a market into humans.

The virus has since spread to more than 24 countries, despite many governments imposing unprecedented travel bans on people coming from China.

The World Health Organization has declared the crisis a global health emergency, and the first foreign death from the virus was reported in the Philippines on Sunday.

In China, all but one of the 57 new deaths reported Monday were in Wuhan and the rest of Hubei province, most of which has been under lockdown for almost two weeks to stop people leaving and transmitting the virus.

The national death toll reached 361, exceeding the 349 mainland fatalities from the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak of 2002-03.

SARS, caused by a pathogen similar to the new coronavirus and also originated in China, killed 774 people—with most of the other deaths in Hong Kong.

Economic woes

The virus is also having an increasingly heavy economic impact, shutting down businesses across China, curbing international travel and impacting production lines of major international brands.

Stock markets in Shanghai and Shenzhen plunged by nearly nine percent on Monday morning as investors returned from a Lunar New Year holiday that had been extended to stop people travelling around China.

Hundreds of firms tumbled by the maximum 10 percent as investors got their first chance in more than a week to react to a barrage of bad news from the spiralling outbreak.

Travel and tourism shares plummeted after domestic and international travel curbs were imposed to slow the virus.

In Wuhan, which has been transformed from a bustling industrial hub into a near-ghost town, residents have been living in deep fear of catching the virus.

The city's medical facilities have been overwhelmed, with state news agency Xinhua reporting Monday that 68 medical teams of 8,300 staff from across China had been sent to Hubei to "aid novel coronavirus control".

The number of infections in China also jumped significantly on Monday, passing 17,200.

Amid mounting pressure the government has been racing to build two new hospitals in extraordinarily quick timeframes.

The first of those, a 1,000-bed facility, was due to open on Monday, just 10 days after construction began.

About 1,400 military medics will treat patients at the hospital, dubbed "Fire God Mountain", according to state media.

However with the [death toll](#) surging in Wuhan and other areas of Hubei, it was not immediately clear what overall impact the hospitals would have on the virus spreading elsewhere.

In a worrying signal about it already spreading in significant numbers to other parts of China, the eastern industrial city of Wenzhou was on Sunday placed under a similar lockdown to Wuhan.

Roads in Wenzhou, 800 kilometres (500 miles) to the east, were closed and its nine million people were ordered to stay indoors.

Only one resident per household in Wenzhou is allowed to go out every

two days to buy necessities, authorities announced.

Travel curbs

The emergence of the virus coincided with the Lunar New Year, when hundreds of millions travel across the country in planes, trains and buses for family reunions.

The holiday—originally scheduled to end last Friday—was extended by three days to give authorities more time to deal with the crisis.

But some major cities—including Shanghai—extended the holiday again, and many schools and universities delayed the start of new terms.

Road traffic on Sunday, when hundreds of millions of people would have been expected to return to their cities of work, was down 80 percent, the transport ministry said.

Train journeys were down 74 percent on last year, according to Xinhua, with plane trips during the new year holiday down around a fifth.

In a bid to stagger the return to work, many companies offered staff the option to work from home or defer travel, or simply closed.

Stopping the spread

The G7 countries—Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Britain and the United States—have all confirmed cases of the [virus](#).

They will discuss a joint response, German Health Minister Jens Spahn said on Sunday.

The US, Australia, New Zealand and Israel have banned foreign nationals from visiting if they have been in China recently, and they have also warned their own citizens against travelling there.

Mongolia, Russia and Nepal have closed their land borders.

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