

Coronavirus cases emerging faster outside China: WHO

February 26 2020



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There are now more new cases of the coronavirus reported each day outside China than inside the hardest-hit country, the World Health Organization said on Wednesday.

"Yesterday, the number of new cases reported outside China exceeded the number of new cases in China for the first time," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told diplomats in Geneva, according to a written version of his speech.

The UN health agency put the number of new cases in China at 411 on Tuesday and those registered outside the country stood at 427.

Governments worldwide are scrambling to prevent the spread of the new [coronavirus](#) after a surge of infections in Italy, Iran and South Korea.

Tedros said the "sudden increase of cases" in those countries was "deeply concerning", adding that a WHO team would travel to Iran this weekend to evaluate the situation.

While new case numbers and deaths are dwindling at the disease epicentre in China, the country remains by far the hardest hit.

Tedros said that as of Wednesday morning, 78,190 cases of COVID-19 had been registered in China, including 2,718 deaths.

That compares with 2,790 cases and 44 deaths reported across 37 other countries.

But WHO has said the epidemic in China peaked and on February 2 and has been declining since.

Bruce Aylward, who headed a WHO-backed expert mission to China, hailed the drastic quarantine and containment measures taken by Beijing, saying the country had "changed the course" of the outbreak.

But he told reporters in Geneva that other nations were "simply not ready".

In Wednesday's speech, Tedros acknowledged that the hike in cases outside China had prompted a push for a pandemic to be declared.

"We should not be too eager to declare a pandemic," he said, stressing that such a declaration could "signal that we can no longer contain the virus, which is not true."

"We are in a fight that can be won if we do the right things."

But he insisted that WHO would not hesitate to declare a pandemic "if it is an accurate description of the situation."

"I am not downplaying the seriousness of the situation, or the potential for this to become a pandemic, because it has that potential," he said.

"All countries, whether they have cases or not, must prepare for a potential [pandemic](#)."

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Citation: Coronavirus cases emerging faster outside China: WHO (2020, February 26) retrieved 6 May 2024 from

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