

WHO says 'way too early' to predict end of novel coronavirus

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The UN health agency on Wednesday cautioned it was "way too early" to say whether COVID-19 might have peaked or when it might end, following a drop in new cases.

"I think it's way too early to try to predict the beginning, the middle or the end of this epidemic right now," Michael Ryan, head of WHO's health emergencies programme, said at the agency's daily news conference.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said: "The number of newly reported cases from China has stabilised in the past week but that has to

be interpreted with extreme caution.

"This outbreak could go in any direction," he added.

The virus has killed more than 1,100 people and infected over 44,600 since it was first detected on December 31.

Ryan said in-depth research by WHO had managed to track down the sources of transmission in almost all the 441 cases of the virus outside of China, with eight exceptions.

"On a global level, we have a good view of this virus," he said.

Tedros also praised Cambodia for agreeing to take in the Westerdam, a US cruise ship that has been rejected at several Asian ports over coronavirus fears.

"This is an example of the international solidarity we have consistently been calling for," he said.

"Outbreaks can bring out the best and worst in people. Stigmatising individuals or entire nations does nothing but harm the response.

"Instead of directing all our energy against the outbreak, stigma diverts our attention and turns people against each other," he added.

Some 300 scientists and donors gathered in Geneva on Tuesday and Wednesday for the first international conference on the virus hosted by the WHO.

Four candidate vaccines against the [virus](#) that are being funded through the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) were discussed.

"I think we will find a [vaccine](#). It will take some time. A vaccine cannot be made overnight," WHO's chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan told reporters.

"Four vaccines are now being funded for the early phases, the pre-[clinical development](#)," she said.

Swaminathan said the first vaccine that was likely to go into human trial in April was the one being developed by US-based Moderna Therapeutics in conjunction with the US National Institutes of Health.

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