

Global panic deepens over China virus

February 6 2020, by Helen Roxburgh and Laurent Thomet



A shopper wearing a protective face mask sorts items in her trolley in front of bare supermarket shelves in Hong Kong, which has been particularly nervous over the new coronavirus, leading to panic buying

China's coronavirus crisis worsened Thursday as the death toll soared to 563 and the plight of thousands trapped on quarantined cruise ships deepened global panic over the epidemic.

More than 28,000 people have been infected in China, where authorities are struggling to contain the outbreak, despite ordering millions indoors in a growing number of cities.

Two dozen countries have confirmed cases of the respiratory disease, which emerged from a market selling exotic animals in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year.

Thousands of holidaymakers on [cruise ships](#) in Hong Kong and Japan face an agonising wait to find out if more among them have been infected.

At least 20 people on the Diamond Princess—off Yokohama since Monday—have tested positive. Some 3,700 passengers and crew from more than 50 countries have been confined to quarters.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said another cruise ship, the Westerdam, was heading to the country with one confirmed case.

He said no foreigners from the vessel, capable of carrying nearly 3,000 passengers and crew, would be allowed to disembark.

In Hong Kong, 3,600 people were spending a second night confined aboard the World Dream. Authorities conducted [health checks](#) after eight former passengers tested positive for the virus.



At least 20 people on board the Diamond Princess cruise ship, pictured at anchor in Yokohama, Japan, have tested positive for the new coronavirus and about 3,700 passengers and crew from more than 50 countries have been confined to quarters

Health officials said they were asking about 5,000 Hong Kongers who had taken trips on the ship since mid-January to contact them.

Hong Kong has been particularly nervous because the crisis revived memories of another coronavirus that causes Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). It killed nearly 300 people in the city and another 349 on the Chinese mainland in 2002-2003.

Panic buying in semi-autonomous Hong Kong left supermarkets empty

of toilet paper following false online claims of shortages, prompting authorities to appeal for calm.

One person has died after contracting the virus in Hong Kong.

While the [death toll](#) continues to rise in China, experts have stressed that at two percent mortality, 2019-nCoV is far less deadly than SARS, which killed around 10 percent of the people it infected 17 years ago.

The outbreak has nevertheless been declared a global health emergency, prompting several governments to warn against travel to China and ban arrivals from the country, while airlines have halted flights.

Almost 200 Canadians showed up at the airport in Wuhan for its first evacuations, most on a commercial airliner chartered by Ottawa, officials said.



The virus epidemic has compelled millions of Chinese to stay indoors, leaving empty roads like this highway in front of the Alibaba headquarters in Hangzhou, southwest of Shanghai

Germany's foreign ministry said it was working to bring home several nationals who had not made it out on a flight that reached Frankfurt last Saturday.

Saudi Arabia banned citizens and resident foreigners from travelling to China, while Air France-KLM extended its flight suspension by another month until March 15.

Chinese President Xi Jinping told Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin

Salman in a call that all countries should "follow World Health Organization guidelines on travel and health in a timely manner", state news agency Xinhua reported.

After Britain advised nationals to leave China, Beijing's ambassador to London said there should not be "such a panic."

Short of medical staff

China has enacted unprecedented measures to contain the virus, which spread during the Lunar New Year holiday in late January, when millions criss-crossed the country.

But deaths and new infections continue to rise, especially at the epicentre in Hubei province, where 18 cities housing 56 million people have been under virtual lockdown since late last month.



Passengers wear protective face masks in the departure hall of Noi Bai International Airport in Hanoi, Vietnam, which shares a long porous border with China and is setting up field hospitals to handle potential new-coronavirus cases

There is a shortage of 2,250 medical personnel in Hubei, deputy provincial governor Yang Yunyan said Thursday. The inability to offer health workers adequate protective gear is hindering the numbers that can be deployed on the front lines, he added.

With Hubei's capital Wuhan overwhelmed, authorities were due to open a second, 1,600-bed field hospital.

The first hospital, with 1,000 beds, opened earlier this week, and authorities said they were converting public buildings into temporary

medical facilities.

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

"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 in southern China, said it had opened a lab in Wuhan able to test 10,000 people a day.

Virus explosion

OUTBREAK

- ▶ Increase in number of cases of disease

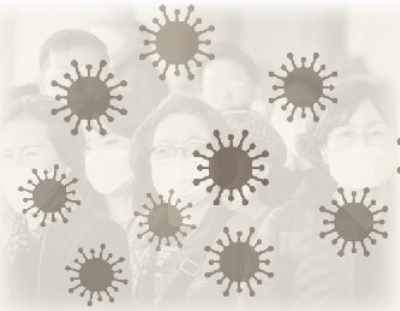


- ▶ **Limited to community** or particular geographic area, may also affect several countries
- ▶ Normally caused by an infection, transmitted through person-to-person or animal-to-person contact, or from the environment

Example → Seasonal influenza

EPIDEMIC

- ▶ **Sudden increase** in number of disease cases

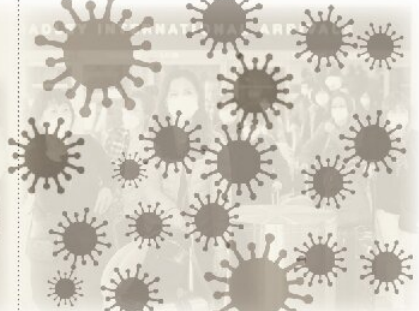


- ▶ Infections are above what is normally expected in population in that area, can spread to other areas or countries
- ▶ Can affect people within a short period of time

→ Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)

PANDEMIC

- ▶ Disease usually affects a large number of people



- ▶ **Has spread over several countries or continents**
- ▶ Viruses that have caused past pandemics typically originated from animal flu viruses

→ 2009 swine flu (H1N1) pandemic

Source: WHO/CDC/APIC

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Comparison of an outbreak, epidemic and pandemic.

'Don't go out'

More cities are ordering people to stay indoors.

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

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

And 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 outbreak has also hit major businesses.

Workers making iPhones at tech giant Foxconn's plant in Henan province, bordering Hubei, will be quarantined for up to two weeks, the company said.

China said it would halve tariffs on \$75 billion worth of US imports, as part of a trade truce with Washington and as officials look to calm markets unnerved by the outbreak.

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