

Vulnerable Pacific islands take hard line on China virus

February 4 2020

The tiny Pacific nation of Micronesia banned its citizens from visiting mainland China Tuesday in the latest move by regional leaders to protect island populations highly vulnerable to infectious outbreaks.

A [measles](#) epidemic in Samoa late last year showed the devastating impact infectious outbreaks can have in remote and under-resourced Pacific [islands](#), killing 83 people, most of them babies and toddlers.

Samoa's initial measles response was criticised for a lack of urgency and bureaucratic inertia, but preventative action against the coronavirus has been swift.

Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) President David Panuelo declared a state of emergency last Friday, banning anyone who had been in mainland China from January 6 from entering his country.

"It is imperative that immediate precautionary measures are put in place in FSM in order to protect (the) lives and safety of its citizens," he said in a public health declaration.

A follow-up statement Tuesday said citizens of Micronesia—an archipelago in the northern Pacific with a population of 102,000 people—were not allowed to visit mainland China.

It said the ban would remain in place "until such time that a determination is made that the coronavirus is effectively contained".

Samoa has also barred visitors from mainland China, unless they have undergone 14-days quarantine in a coronavirus-free country prior to arrival and provide a medical clearance certificate.

Fiji has implemented similar measures, while the Marshall Islands ban includes visitors from Hong Kong and Macau, as well as mainland China.

In New Zealand, a major travel hub for the Pacific islands, concerns about coronavirus prompted Auckland to cancel its annual Lantern Festival, which usually attracts crowds of about 200,000.

"It's sad that the festival won't be going ahead this year," Auckland mayor Phil Goff said.

"But it's important to respect the wishes of Auckland's Chinese community, many of whom don't feel it is appropriate to celebrate the festival given the ongoing coronavirus outbreak in China and its toll on life there."

Health authorities have not reported any confirmed cases of coronavirus in the Pacific islands or New Zealand.

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