

Test 'every suspected case' of COVID-19: WHO

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The World Health Organization called Monday for countries to test every suspected case of COVID-19, as the rest of the world registered more cases and deaths in the pandemic than China.

"You cannot fight a fire blindfolded," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters in a virtual press conference from the UN agency's headquarters in Geneva.

"In the past week, we have seen a rapid escalation of cases of COVID-19," he said, as the global death toll in the [pandemic](#) soared past 7,000.

More cases and deaths have now been reported in the rest of the world than in China, where the new [coronavirus](#) first surfaced in December, he added.

Tedros did not provide the latest numbers, but according to an AFP tally Monday based on official sources, more than 175,500 cases have been recorded worldwide.

The worst affected countries in terms of fatalities are mainland China, with more than 3,200 deaths, Italy with more than 2,000 deaths, over 853 in Iran and over 300 in Spain.

The WHO chief warned that as cases are soaring "we have not seen an urgent enough escalation in testing, isolation and contact tracing, which is the backbone of the response."

'Test and isolate'

He hailed dramatic measures put in place by a range of governments, including the closing of schools and shops, pointing out that "social distancing measures can help to reduce transmission and enable health systems to cope."

Efforts to get people to wash their hands and sneeze into an elbow were also important tools to reduce transmission, he said.

"But on their own, they are not enough to extinguish this pandemic," Tedros warned, stressing the need to break the chains of transmission.

"To do that, you must test and isolate," he said, stressing that "we cannot stop this pandemic if we don't know who is infected."

The WHO, he said, was urging countries to "Test, test, test. Test every suspected case."

He hailed the surging production in tests to meet the [global demand](#), and noted that the WHO itself had shipped nearly 1.5 million tests to 120 countries, to help those most in need.

"WHO advises that all [confirmed cases](#), even mild cases, should be isolated in [health facilities](#), to prevent transmission and provide adequate care," Tedros said.

He acknowledged though that many countries have already exceeded their capacity to care for mild cases, and urged those countries to prioritise [older patients](#) and those with underlying [health conditions](#), while others could be isolated at home.

'Children have died'

Tedros also noted that people infected with COVID-19 could still infect others after they stop feeling sick, stressing that isolation "measures should continue for at least two weeks after symptoms disappear."

He urged people not to dismiss the pandemic as something that only affected the elderly.

"This is a serious disease," he said, adding that "although the evidence we have suggests that those over 60 are at highest risk, young people,

including children, have died."

He called on "every country and every individual to do everything they can to stop transmission."

"We are all in this together," he said, asking people to show more solidarity and refrain "from hoarding essential items, including medicines."

"Hoarding can create shortages of medicines and other essential products, which can exacerbate suffering," he said.

Tedros described the pandemic as "the defining global health crisis of our time."

"The days, weeks and months ahead will be a test of our resolve, a test of our trust in science, and a [test](#) of solidarity," he said.

"Crises like this tend to bring out the best and worst in humanity."

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