

WHO says world in uncharted territory as US virus toll rises

March 3 2020, by Laurent Thomet, With Issam Ahmed In Washington



The WHO has warned that the world has entered uncharted territory in its fight against the deadly new coronavirus

The world has entered uncharted territory in its battle against the deadly coronavirus, the UN health agency warned, as new infections dropped

dramatically in China on Tuesday but surged abroad with the US death toll rising to six.

Globally, the virus has killed more than 3,100 people and infected over 90,000 even as a clear shift in the crisis emerges, with nine times as many new cases recorded outside China as inside, according to the World Health Organization.

China has imposed draconian quarantines and travel restrictions to keep large swathes of the population indoors—a strategy that appears to have paid off as new cases have been generally falling for days.

While Italy has locked down towns, other countries have stopped short of imposing mass quarantines and instead have discouraged large gatherings, delayed sporting events and banned arrivals from virus-hit nations.

Twitter told staff across the world to work from home.

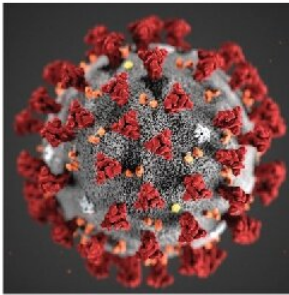
South Korea, Iran and Italy have emerged as major COVID-19 hotspots, which emerged from a market that sold wild animals in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year.

With concern growing about the impact on the global economy, G7 finance ministers and central bank chiefs will hold talks on Tuesday.

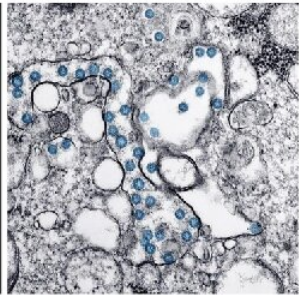
South Korea, the biggest cluster outside China, reported 851 new cases, its biggest daily increase, sending its total past 5,000 while its death toll rose to 28.

Portraits of a virus

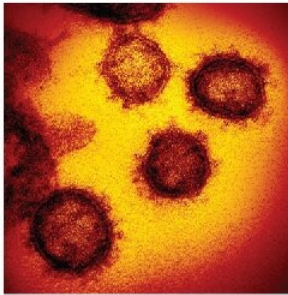
Technical illustrations and artificially coloured handout images of the new coronavirus (formally known as SARS-CoV-2) which causes the disease known as COVID-19



Ultrastructural morphology, created by Lizabeth Menzies / CDC ¹



Transmission electron microscope image by CDC, virus coloured blue



Transmission electron microscope image by NIH ²

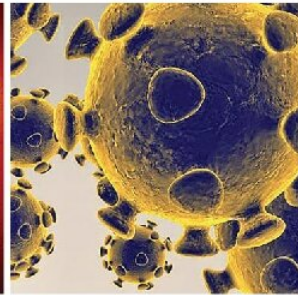
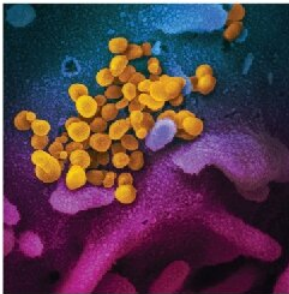
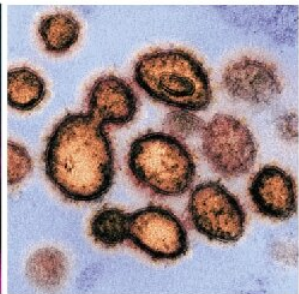


Illustration by the US Food and Drug Administration



Scanning electron microscope image by NIH showing yellow virus particles emerging from cells cultured in a lab



Transmission electron microscope image by NIH

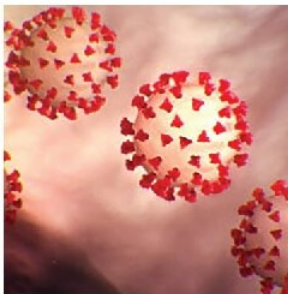
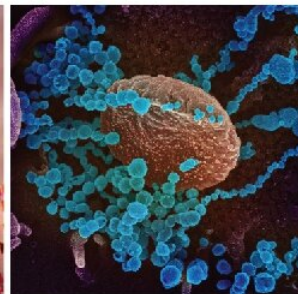


Illustration released by CDC



Scanning electron microscope image by NIH, virus coloured blue, emerging cells

Sources: ¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ²National Institutes of Health

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Technical illustrations and artificially coloured handout images of the new coronavirus (formally known as SARS-CoV-2) which causes the disease known as COVID-19.

"The entire country has entered a war with the infectious disease," South Korean President Moon Jae-in said.

By contrast, China reported 125 new cases Tuesday—its lowest daily increase in six weeks—with all but 11 infections in Hubei province, of

which Wuhan is the capital.

The nationwide death toll rose to 2,943 with 31 more deaths, with some 80,000 total cases.

China has even confirmed 13 imported infections, including eight Chinese nationals who worked at the same restaurant in northern Italy's Lombardy region.

Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong province are imposing 14-day quarantines on people arriving from countries with a severe epidemic.

"We are in uncharted territory," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said Monday.

"We have never before seen a respiratory pathogen that is capable of community transmission, but which can also be contained with the right measures."



South Korea has the world's biggest cluster of coronavirus cases outside mainland China

Community transmission means infections within a population are not imported from another virus-hit area.

The US is now facing a potential epidemic, with six people dying in the northwestern state of Washington, where officials warned residents the battle against the disease was shifting from containment to mitigation.

Five of the deaths were in King County, which has more than two million residents and is home to Seattle, a major commercial and transportation hub.

US eyes treatment

The White House, which has been accused of downplaying the threat from the virus, struck a bullish tone.

Vice President Mike Pence declared that a treatment "could literally be available by this summer, or early fall".

He was likely referring to remdesivir, an antiviral drug developed by the pharmaceutical firm Gilead that has already been used to treat one US patient and was moving toward two expansive final stage trials in Asia.



Coronavirus fears have sparked panic buying in many parts of the world

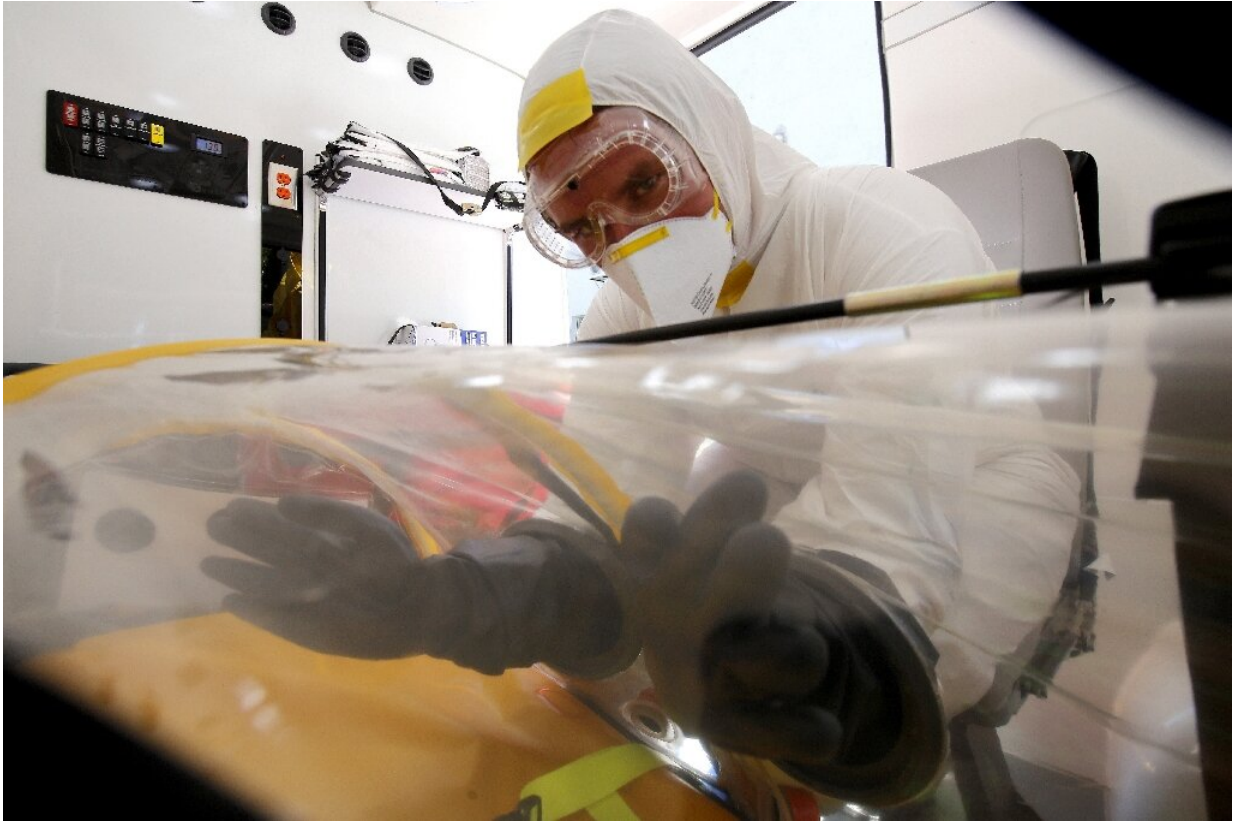
Pence also announced American pharmaceuticals were forming a consortium to fight the virus, and that South Korea and Italy would screen all their airline passengers bound for the US.

Despite its world-class hospitals and cutting-edge research, the US is viewed as vulnerable to an epidemic because of glaring disparities in healthcare availability, with nearly 28 million people without coverage.

Chinese officials have touted progress in their own battle against the epidemic, and in another sign of growing confidence, 19 provinces resumed inter-provincial bus services on Sunday, state media said.

But the restrictions have hammered the world's second-largest economy and threatened to cut into global growth.

After tanking last week, most Asian stock markets were up Tuesday following a surge on Wall Street as governments and central banks said they would step in if needed to soften the blow.



Fears about the economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak have spooked stock markets around the world



The virus outbreak has impacted travel, businesses and events around the world



The virus has infected more than 90,000 people around the world

Hotspots elsewhere

UN medical experts arrived in Iran on Monday to help tackle the world's second-deadliest coronavirus outbreak, with 66 fatalities and more than 1,500 infections.

In Italy, tourist hotspots including the Duomo in Milan reopened to visitors but access was limited to avoid overcrowding.

Italy, Europe's worst-affected country with around 1,700 infections, said Monday deaths from the virus had jumped 18 to 52.

The WHO says the virus—which has a mortality rate between two and five percent—particularly hits older people or those weakened by other illnesses.

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