

China may soon lift quarantine on virus-hit Hubei province: official

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China may soon lift the quarantine imposed on the province at the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak which has been under lockdown for more than a month, a senior government official hinted Friday.

Asked about the draconian measures taken in central Hubei province to contain the spread of the virus, Ding Xiangyang, deputy secretary-general of China's State Council, told journalists "the day everyone is waiting for will not be too far away".

But Ding stressed that cases in Hubei—and its capital Wuhan where the virus emerged—still made up a huge proportion of the national toll.

Some 56 million people in Hubei have been effectively quarantined since late January, to stop the virus from spreading across the country when people returned to work from their hometowns after the extended Lunar New Year break.

But new cases in Hubei and Wuhan have been on a [downward trend](#) for several weeks.

For the first time since China started publishing cases of new infections, on Friday there were no new [cases](#) reported in Hubei outside Wuhan, with 126.

"I believe the day everyone is waiting for will not be too far away," Ding said.

As the situation improves, the authorities will make adjustments, he said.

His remarks are the latest in a number of signs that life in China may soon begin returning to normal.

The small Hubei city of Chibi, south of Wuhan, removed road blocks on Friday after 19 days without new infections, allowing freer movement of traffic inside—but not out of—the city.

It also comes as some regions prepare to reopen schools from next week, after more than a month of closures across the country.

Qinghai province, spread across the Tibetan Plateau, announced in late February that high schools and vocational schools would resume gradually from March 9 to 13.

Middle schools would reopen later in the month.

Mountainous Guizhou province in southwest China has also said some students in high school and middle [school](#) would resume classes from March 16.

Ding said Friday that some have questioned if it was necessary for so many people in Wuhan to be quarantined in their communities.

He likened the struggle against the epidemic to "armies fighting in a state of war", where people have to hide in underground bunkers or risk casualties.

The [coronavirus](#) has killed over 3,000 people in China and infected more than 80,500.

But officials noted the situation was improving and that Hubei now had enough medical protection materials, key treatment drugs and equipment—after facing severe shortages earlier.

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