**Has the outbreak in China peaked?**

A [study](https://github.com/cmrivers/ncov/blob/master/COVID-19.pdf) of nearly 45,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases in China suggests that the outbreak might already have reached its climax. The report, from the country’s Center for Disease Control and Prevention, says that the peak — the day with the highest number of new infections — occurred around the end of January. The number of new laboratory-confirmed cases per day declined from then to 11 February, the end of the study period. However, the number of new suspected cases and cases diagnosed by physicians using chest scans, known as clinically diagnosed cases, stayed at roughly the same levels.

The latest data on coronavirus infections in China appear to show a decline in new cases, said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO), at a press briefing on 17 February, the same day the Chinese report was released. But he said the trend must be interpreted cautiously. “It’s too early to tell if this new reported decline will continue,” he said. “Every scenario is still on the table.”

Raina MacIntyre, a physician and epidemiologist at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia, agrees that the data need to be considered with caution, but says the general trends are informative. The WHO’s reports also show a decline in new cases reported per day in China and worldwide, she says.

But the extended Chinese holiday period that ended on 9 February means there might be another increase in new cases around 21 February, as people return to work. “Often with epidemics we see more than one peak,” says MacIntyre.

Epidemiologists have been trying to estimate roughly when the outbreak will peak, so public-health officials can prepare hospitals and work out when it will be safe to lift travel restrictions in Wuhan and several nearby cities.

Some models suggest that the climax will happen [any time now](https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00361-5). Others say that it is months away and that the virus will infect millions — or, in one estimate, hundreds of millions — of people before then. This model assumes that many more people have been infected than is reflected by official counts, but that these people have no symptoms or are not ill enough to seek medical treatment.

