

Deaths in China Rise, With No Sign of Slowdown

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Highlight: Hyundai is suspending production in South Korea amid supply chain problems linked to the coronavirus, and Japan quarantined a cruise ship where 10 infections were found.

Body

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Read the latest developments in the coronavirus outbreak here.

As deaths approach 500, no sign of a slowdown.

The death toll from the monthlong coronavirus outbreak has continued to climb, rising to 490. New cases have surged by double-digit percentages in the past 11 days, with no sign of a slowdown.

More people have now died in this epidemic than in the severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS, outbreak of 2002-2003 in mainland China. During that outbreak, 349 people died.

The new figures from China's Health Commission on Wednesday showed that 65 people died on Tuesday and that 3,887 more people had been infected. So far, 24,324 people have been infected.

Health experts say the death toll is likely to rise because of the large number of infections. The mortality rate of the coronavirus, about 2 percent so far, appears to be far lower than SARS, which has a mortality rate of about 10 percent.

Experts warn they still lack full data to say definitively how lethal the new coronavirus is. Many residents in Wuhan believe the death toll is much higher than the official tally because people with flulike symptoms are being turned away by overstretched hospitals. The health care system there is so overwhelmed that many cases are not diagnosed because of a shortage of testing kits.

The number of people recovering from the virus is also rising, suggesting that the treatment plan is working. On Tuesday, 262 people left the hospitals. The number of new suspected cases has dropped for two days in a row. Officials said they were tracking 3,971 new suspected cases, compared with 5,173 cases the day before.

On Tuesday, health officials released details of the deaths so far, saying that two-thirds of them were men. More than 80 percent were over 60 years old, and they typically had pre-existing health conditions such as cardiovascular diseases or diabetes.

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The central province of Hubei has been hardest hit by the virus. The epicenter of the outbreak is home to the bulk of deaths (479) and infections (16,678). Wuhan, the capital of Hubei, in particular has borne the brunt of the deaths and infections.

The government said it has put 252,154 people under surveillance.

A second evacuation of Americans from China has begun.

The United States has begun its second airlift of American citizens out of China.

"Two planes have departed Wuhan en route to the United States," the State Department said in a statement Wednesday night.

Little information was immediately available on the planes' destination.

But it was believed that like the first Americans evacuated from Wuhan, the passengers will be taken to a military base and directed to remain there pending medical tests.

The first evacuees were flown from Wuhan on Jan. 29, and their plane stopped in Anchorage to refuel and for the passengers to be given initial screenings. The Boeing 747 then continued on to March Air Reserve Base in Riverside, Calif.

Britain and France urged their citizens to leave China.

Britain and France intensified warnings to their citizens in China on Tuesday, urging all who could do so to vacate the mainland to minimize the risk of infection.

"If you're in China and able to leave, you should do so," Britain's Foreign Office said in an updated travel advisory.

The Foreign Office also advised "against all travel" to Hubei Province, the epicenter of the outbreak, and "against all but essential travel to the rest of mainland China." It made exceptions for Hong Kong and Macau.

"Where there are still British nationals in Hubei Province who wish to be evacuated, we will continue to work around the clock to facilitate this," said Britain's foreign secretary, Dominic Raab.

France's Foreign Ministry issued a similar warning.

"As a precaution," the warning said, "it is recommended that the French, in particular families, who have no essential reason to stay in China, move away temporarily from the country."

In Britain, at least, the government faced criticism for saying little about why it had escalated its warnings, leaving some Britons in China feeling anxious and confused.

Emily Thornberry, the opposition Labour Party's spokeswoman on foreign affairs, accused the government of abandoning British citizens in China. "From the very start of this outbreak, the government's response has been a total shambles," she said.

Hyundai suspended production at South Korea car factories.

Hyundai, the world's fifth-largest carmaker, said on Tuesday that it was suspending production lines at its car factories in South Korea, one of the first major manufacturers to face severe supply chain issues because of the coronavirus.

Hyundai, which relies on auto parts from China, said in a statement that it had "decided to suspend its production lines from operating at its plants in Korea. The decision is due to disruptions in the supply of parts resulting from the coronavirus outbreak in China."

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Many auto plants in China have shut down because of the virus, including factories run by Hyundai, Tesla, Ford and Nissan. Hyundai plants in South Korea would be the first to shut down lines outside China.

"The company is reviewing various measures to minimize the disruption of its operations, including seeking alternative suppliers in other regions," a Hyundai spokesman said in an email.

Hyundai has a worldwide network of factories, including plants in Russia, Turkey, the Czech Republic and Montgomery, Ala., which can probably make up for lost production in Korea.

But the shutdown of some production at its Korean plants may signal further disruptions at manufacturers that depend on parts from China. The longer that Chinese factories remain shut down, the greater the risk of shortages of key components.

The oil industry is already in the doldrums.

At a time when they are already cutting jobs and weighed down by debt, American oil producers are bracing for the latest shock to hit world energy markets: the economic effects of the coronavirus outbreak on China and beyond.

Oil and natural gas producers have been suffering from low commodity prices for the past year and now expect a sharp drop in global prices for their products. As a result, they are preparing to slash investments in exploration and production.

The price of West Texas intermediate crude, a key benchmark, fell below \$50 on Monday, a 20 percent decline in less than a month. After recovering slightly Tuesday morning, the price fell further.

Just a few weeks after the outbreak of the virus, daily Chinese oil demand is already down 20 percent because of dwindling air travel, road transportation and manufacturing.

China buys only about 200,000 barrels a day of oil and refined transportation fuels from the United States, out of 8.5 million barrels of total daily American exports. But oil is a global commodity, and benchmark prices are set on world markets, not domestically. Lower prices mean lower profits.

"It's a blow," said Steven Pruett, chief executive of Elevation Resources.

'The virus is the enemy, not the Chinese.'

China's consul general in New York, Huang Ping, publicly thanked the Chinese-American community and other concerned Americans on Tuesday for their aid in battling the coronavirus outbreak.

But Mr. Huang, a veteran diplomat, also criticized what he described as an overreaction by the American government in severely restricting travel to and from China. He singled out in particular the decision to evacuate the American Consulate in Wuhan, the city of 11 million in Hubei where the outbreak was first detected.

"I personally don't quite get it," Mr. Huang said at a news conference at the Chinese Consulate in Manhattan. "It's not the practice of Chinese diplomats. I myself did a few evacuations, and at a difficult time of something like that, the diplomats of China would be sent in, rather than pulling out, because you might get people there who need you."

Mr. Huang, whose consular operations cover 10 states where 130,000 Chinese students are enrolled in universities, also said he had no clarity on how many of them were from Hubei or how recently they had been there, partly because of American privacy rules.

"We've been trying our best to find out this information," he said. "But it's not that easy."

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Mr. Huang spoke a day after visiting Boston, where a University of Massachusetts student tested positive for the coronavirus last week after returning from China. School officials said the student was recovering, and remained in isolation.

Asked about instances of anti-Chinese bigotry in the United States that have been tied to the coronavirus outbreak, Mr. Huang said that “I really don’t want to see this,” and that he had expressed his concern to Massachusetts officials that the Boston case not incite such behavior.

“I said, ‘The virus is the enemy, not the Chinese,’” Mr. Huang said.

[Have you or someone you know faced prejudice in the United States as a result of coronavirus fears? Please contact us at coronavirus@nytimes.com if you are willing to share your story.]

Looking for the basics? Start [here](#).

What is a coronavirus, and how dangerous is it? Read up on the basics, including its symptoms and how it is transmitted.

Where has the virus spread? You can track its movement with this [map](#).

How is the United States being affected? There were 11 confirmed cases as of Monday. American citizens and permanent residents who fly to the United States from China are now subject to a two-week quarantine.

Xi Jinping signaled a more assertive response.

China’s leader, Xi Jinping, has signaled a more assertive strategy for dealing with the coronavirus epidemic after days of seeming to retreat from center stage.

His convening of a second special Communist Party meeting on Monday was only his second public appearance since the government in Wuhan, which is at the epicenter of the outbreak, took the extraordinary step of locking down the city on Jan. 23. That order was almost certainly approved at the highest levels in Beijing.

Mr. Xi sent Premier Li Keqiang to Wuhan more than a week ago, when the death toll stood at 106. By Tuesday, the toll in China was more than 420 deaths. The Chinese government has reported 20,438 confirmed cases.

Mr. Xi called the crisis “a major test of China’s system and capacity for governance,” according to the state-run news media. He warned officials not to resist orders or to let “bureaucratism” slow government efforts to bring the outbreak under control.

“Those who disobey the unified command or shirk off responsibilities will be punished,” Mr. Xi said, the Xinhua news agency reported.

Hong Kong’s first death was reported amid calls for a border shutdown.

A 39-year-old man in Hong Kong died on Tuesday from the coronavirus, the city’s Hospital Authority said.

It was the first death from the outbreak was in Hong Kong, and the second outside mainland China. The other death, of a man from Wuhan, was in the Philippines.

The man who died in Hong Kong traveled by train to Wuhan on Jan. 21 and returned to the Chinese territory two days later, the government said. Health officials said he also had diabetes, which may have impaired his immune system.

The man’s mother, who did not travel to Wuhan, later contracted the virus. His wife and two children, as well as a domestic worker employed by the family, are being quarantined.

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Though Hong Kong shares a landmass with mainland China, the territory has not been hit nearly as hard by the outbreak, and has just 17 confirmed cases. A neighboring city just across the border, Shenzhen, has had hundreds of cases.

Hong Kong's government has been under pressure to close its borders to mainland China. All but three border checkpoints out of 16 were shut on Monday, but the remaining entry points can still admit thousands of mainland Chinese visitors per day.

More than 2,500 medical workers went on strike Monday to demand a fully closed border.

China struggles to keep food available and prices affordable.

The coronavirus crisis is testing China's ability to feed its 1.4 billion people, one of the Communist Party's proudest achievements.

Cooped up at home and fearful that the epidemic could last weeks or even months, families across China are hoarding provisions, making it harder for shops and supermarkets to keep fresh food in stock. Many places have closed off roads to passing traffic, slowing truck shipments and raising freight costs.

Chinese officials have vowed to keep food flowing to Wuhan, the inland city of 11 million at the center of the outbreak. Shouguang, one of the country's biggest hubs for growing, trading and shipping vegetables, has begun donating produce by the truckload to the locked-down city.

Confusion for passengers traveling to, from and in Asia.

As airlines cancel flights to and from China, some travelers are trying to get refunds, while others are unsure of whether to rebook their trips for later dates or cancel them altogether.

There is also confusion for those with itineraries via China to other destinations.

InsureMyTrip, a travel insurance comparison site, has experienced "at least a 30 percent increase in call volume," said Julie Loffredi, the media relations manager. Most calls concern the coronavirus.

For some, it is unclear who is responsible for issuing refunds, and travel insurance does not always cover the cost of a canceled trip, since policies differ and refund eligibility may depend on when an insurance policy was bought.

On Tuesday, United Airlines said that it would suspend flights from Feb. 8 until Feb. 20 in light of a "continued drop in demand." In 2018, United carried 14.5 percent of the 3.9 million passengers who took nonstop flights between the United States and Hong Kong.

Cathay Pacific, the flagship airline of Hong Kong, said it was temporarily cutting its flight capacity 30 percent, including suspending 90 percent of its flights into mainland China.

American Airlines said it had suspended flights to Hong Kong from both Dallas/Fort Worth and Los Angeles through Feb. 20 "due to demand."

And Japan Airlines said it was suspending several flights to mainland China, and the British authorities said that British Airways and Virgin Atlantic had suspended their mainland China flights.

A drugmaker is trying to develop a strong vaccine.

The drugmaker GlaxoSmithKline has joined the global hunt for a vaccine for the new coronavirus, aiming to develop a type of treatment that increases the protection offered by a vaccine.

That approach relies on using an agent known as an adjuvant, which helps create stronger and longer-lasting immunity against infections than a vaccine can provide on its own.

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The use of this technology allows scientists to produce vaccines much faster and make them available to more people, said Dr. Richard Hatchett, the chief executive of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, which is partnering with GSK. GSK also used adjuvant technology to develop vaccines against pandemic influenza in 2009.

More than a dozen biotech companies and academic groups are working on coronavirus vaccines.

Do masks work? The debate flares up.

Taiwan's Centers for Disease Control said last week that healthy people did not need to wear surgical masks unless visiting a hospital. Hong Kong's chief executive instructed officials on Tuesday to stop wearing masks to help save supplies for medical workers.

The answer to the simplest of questions — do the masks work? — is, unfortunately, not that simple. There isn't much high-quality scientific evidence on whether masks are an effective safeguard outside health care settings, where experts generally agree that they reduce risks.

It appears that while they can slow the spread of disease when worn by sick people, the masks — of which there is now a global shortage — do little when worn by healthy people.

Still, in some Asian cities like Hong Kong, where long lines form each morning for limited mask supplies, most people on sidewalks and public transportation wear one, and people who don't are sometimes questioned about it.

Most experts agree: To prevent the spread of the coronavirus and keep yourself safe, it's best to wash your hands and avoid touching your face.

Markets are rising as China gives its economy another boost.

Ever since the coronavirus outbreak was first reported, investors have been trying to handicap its impact on the global economy.

Last week, the concern was that the travel shutdowns and shuttered factories would hurt growth both in China and elsewhere.

This week, the sentiment seems to be that maybe the big picture won't be so bad after all.

Stocks shot higher on Tuesday, with the S&P 500 on track for its best day of the year, after China took further measures to bolster its economy amid the still-expanding outbreak.

The People's Bank of China said that it pumped a further 500 billion yuan (roughly \$71 billion) into the country's financial system on Tuesday, following an injection of 1.2 trillion yuan (over \$170 billion) into its financial markets the day before.

It wasn't just Wall Street that rallied on the news. In Asia, stocks in Shanghai and Hong Kong were also sharply higher. Major European markets in France, Germany and Italy rose more than 1 percent.

Other recent updates on corporate earnings and the economy have also given investors a lift.

On Monday, a closely watched gauge of manufacturing showed that factory activity expanded in the United States in January, after five straight months of contraction in the industrial sector. The report suggested that the manufacturing turnaround — a reflection of a global factory slowdown widely linked to the trade war — that had hampered the American economy might have been easing, at least before the outbreak in China hit.

The recent round of fourth-quarter corporate earning reports have also been better than expected.

Of course, investors can change their minds quickly, and the mood in stock markets may well sour if traders are confronted with evidence of the coronavirus impact that they had not anticipated.

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But for now, even those companies that are certain to be affected by the shutdowns are rebounding. For example, after officials in the city of Macau asked its 41 casinos to close for half a month — a move that will shut down the world's gambling capital — shares of the big casinos operators Wynn Resorts and Las Vegas Sands rose.

10 passengers on a cruise ship in Japan tested positive for the virus.

Ten passengers on a cruise ship quarantined in Yokohama, Japan, have tested positive for the coronavirus, Japan's health minister said on Wednesday.

The ship, carrying around 3,700 people, arrived in Yokohama on Tuesday, but the authorities did not allow anyone off. An 80-year-old Hong Kong resident who had disembarked earlier in his home city was found to be infected.

In all, 273 passengers were tested for the virus after everyone on board underwent an initial health screening. Twenty-one were cleared, and officials were awaiting the other results.

The passengers who tested positive were being transported by a Japanese Coast Guard ship to a hospital. The other passengers are to remain quarantined on board the Princess Cruises ship.

Also on Wednesday, the American military, which has a large presence in Japan, said that anyone under its jurisdiction who was returning to the country from China would undergo a 14-day quarantine.

A suspected case in New York has proven unfounded.

A woman hospitalized in New York City amid concerns that she might have the coronavirus has tested negative, city health officials said Tuesday.

The woman, was one of three people recently hospitalized in the city who doctors thought might be infected.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported the negative test results to the city authorities on Tuesday, officials said. Test results for the other two patients are pending, officials said.

"We're relieved to hear that the person in question does not have the novel coronavirus," Mayor Bill de Blasio said in a statement. "I can't say this enough: If you have the symptoms and recent travel history, please see your health provider immediately."

There has yet to be a confirmed case of the new illness in New York City or anywhere in New York State.

But like other cities, New York is starting to experience the economic fallout of a precipitous drop in Chinese visitors because of travel restrictions. Tour operators and travel agents in the New York area are bracing for empty rooms in hotels and empty seats on tour buses.

Chinese tourists represent the second-largest group of foreign travelers to New York.

A company that arranges Chinese-language bus tours of the sights in Manhattan is dealing with as many as 300 cancellations from Chinese tourists. And the owner of a Queens travel agency who had booked trips for 200 Chinese tourists in the next two weeks said he might have to lay off two of his five employees.

Restaurant and store owners in New York's three main Chinatowns say business has been hurt. In restaurants in the Manhattan Chinatown, workers and owners said business had dropped 50 to 70 percent in the last 10 days.

Other victims of the Wuhan lockdown: pets left alone in homes.

With Wuhan in lockdown, volunteers are trying to reach thousands of pets trapped alone in homes and at risk of starvation. Many pet owners who traveled out of the city during the Lunar New Year holiday period left only a few days' supply of food and water, and they have taken to social media to plead for help in checking on their animals.

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Hundreds of people, worried about their cats, dogs, pigs and snakes, have joined chat groups connecting them with volunteers. On Saturday, the Wuhan Small Animal Protection Association, which is providing food and water to pets in isolation, said it had helped more than 600 pets in the last week.

One Wuhan resident who asked to be identified as Lao Mao, or Old Cat, told Reuters that his team of volunteers had rescued more than 1,000 pets since Jan. 25, and estimated that as many as 50,000 pets remained unattended in the city.

But gaining entry to locked apartments and buildings, even with owners' permission, has been a challenge.

In one instance, Lao Mao said, he climbed up rusty pipes to feed two cats in a third-floor apartment that had been left alone for 10 days. He found the cats barely alive under a sofa. When he video-called the owners, who could not return to Wuhan because of roadblocks, they cried.

Macau is closing all casinos for two weeks.

Macau's top official said on Tuesday that the government would shut down the city's lucrative casinos for half a month to combat the coronavirus outbreak, a drastic move that will further weaken the Chinese territory's ailing economy.

The semiautonomous enclave, which neighbors Hong Kong and is the world's largest gambling hub, has reported 10 confirmed cases of the coronavirus, with a worker in the gambling industry among those infected. The shutdown was announced on Tuesday by Ho Iat Seng, the chief executive.

"Of course this was a difficult decision, but we must do it for the health of Macau's residents," Mr. Ho said.

Macau's casinos have struggled as the coronavirus outbreak led to growing travel restrictions for visitors from the mainland. Macau, the only place in China where casino gambling is legal, derives a significant portion of its revenue from gamblers from the mainland.

Mr. Ho also said the city's basic public services — except for emergency ones — would be suspended, and he urged Macau residents to "not go outside" except to get food.

A steady climb in infections in China, but some encouraging news, too.

The death toll from the new coronavirus has exceeded that of the severe acute respiratory syndrome outbreak in 2002 and 2003 in mainland China. But the number of people who have recovered nationwide has also risen in recent days, suggesting that the new virus's fatality rate is relatively low.

China's Health Commission reported on Tuesday that there were 632 recoveries and more than 420 deaths nationwide. During the SARS outbreak, 349 people died in mainland China.

Health experts say they are encouraged by the steady rise in the number of recoveries. They take it as evidence that the treatments meted out have been effective and that the virus does not appear to be as deadly as SARS.

SARS had a mortality rate of 9.6 percent, and about 2 percent of those reported to have been infected with the new coronavirus have died.

Reporting was contributed by Daniel Victor, Elaine Yu, Tiffany May, Steven Lee Myers, Raymond Zhong, Geneva Abdul, Li Yuan, Tess Felder, Knvul Sheikh, Damien Cave, Paul Mozur, Ben Dooley, Hisako Ueno, Kate Conger, Isabella Kwai, Tariro Mzezewa, Alexandra Stevenson, Christopher F. Schuetze, Julie Bosman, Denise Grady, Mitch Smith, James Barron, Donald F. McNeil Jr., Benjamin Mueller, Rick Gladstone and Clifford Krauss.

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