Special Report
Coronavirus – Wuhan, China

UPDATE: 28 JANUARY 2020

An outbreak of viral pneumonia – identified as a new strain of coronavirus (in the same family as SARS and MERS), 2019-nCoV (novel coronavirus) – has been reported in the city of Wuhan, Hubei Province in China. Since December 2019, the virus has now spread outside of Wuhan and into several major cities in China; bringing the total number of confirmed cases to over 4,600 and 100 deaths.

Outside of China:
Cases have been confirmed in Australia, Cambodia, Canada, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, Malaysia, Nepal, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, the United States and Vietnam; they are linked to travel from China.

LOCAL RESPONSE

Local Containment Measures:
Chinese officials have set parameters to contain the outbreak, including quarantine of several cities in the Hubei Province or mandatory use of face masks in public.

Impact of Local Health Care:
With the influx of patients with respiratory symptoms, several cities in China are struggling to keep up with the demand for health care. There have been reports on shortages of materials, equipment and staffing. The Chinese authorities have deployed military clinicians to impacted area for support. Additional hospital infrastructure are also being built to cater specifically to patients impacted by the illness, notably the Huoshenshan Hospital (700 to 1000 beds) and Leishenshan Hospital (1300 to 1500 beds) in Wuhan with respective expected completion dates of 2 and 5 February. It is important that expatriates or travelers to factor in the potential lack of health care resources for any other health care concerns. Any medical evacuation from China could be delayed as patients may need to test negative for 2019-nCoV prior to being evacuated out of the country.

Travel
Local Travel Restrictions:
With the influx of patients with respiratory symptoms, several cities in China are struggling to keep up with the demand for health care.

Global Guidelines:
Wuhan remains under a lockdown; all transportation in and out of the city is suspended and only extraordinary cases are allowed to leave. Other cities within Hubei province are subject to less strenuous restrictions, but nonetheless exist and may cause significant delays for travelers attempting to leave. Major cities such as Beijing have not imposed any serious transportation restrictions. However, the situation may change with short notice as the number of cases rise.

Commercial Air Travel:
Outbound flights from China are subject to additional inspection in the form of health screenings and temperature checks, as well as quarantine of suspected cases. These measures have already been implemented in multiple countries such as the U.S., Singapore, Malaysia, Nepal, Thailand, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Japan, South Korea, India, Nigeria, Australia, Italy and increasingly countries like the Marshall Islands and Samoa have banned direct travels from China and require travelers to have spent at least 14 days in a country free of the virus before entry is granted.

China’s neighbors are taking precautions to prevent further spread of the virus. For example, the Mongolian government has announced the closure of its land border with China. Additionally, Russia has also closed borders with China in the Jewish Autonomous Region as well as the Khabarovsk and Amur regions. Furthermore, Russia will not accept Chinese tour groups. In Hong Kong, the government announced plans to halt all cross-border rail and ferry services as well as reduce the number of flights to mainland cities by 50% beginning on 30 January. The Singapore government also implemented an entry ban on travelers from Hubei province, or who traveled there within 14 days of their arrival in Singapore.

Air Medical Transport:
Conditions non-related to 2019-nCoV: Patients being transported out of China by air ambulance are required to show a certificate that they are not positive for the new virus.
The medical transport of any potential 2019-nCoV cases will require following the transport guidelines from the CDC established for MERS and SARS. To consider:

- All transports must be cleared by health authorities in all countries impacted by the transport in order to limit the virus from spreading to additional regions
- All health care professionals involved in the transports must be fully trained to specific disease protocols
- The transport may require the use of a bio-containment unit

Commercial flights should not be considered for potential 2019-nCoV patients.

THE NEW CORONAVIRUS
2019-nCov Illness:
The illness may vary in severity (mild, moderate to severe) and symptoms may include fever, cough and shortness of breath. According to the US CDC, the symptoms “may appear in as few as 2 days or as long as 14 after exposure”. Human-to-Human transmission has been confirmed. Recent travelers from the area experiencing fever or respiratory symptoms are advised to seek medical attention immediately.

Prevention:
The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC) recommends the following to reduce the risk of infection and spread:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds; if soap is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Stay home while you are sick
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands

Clean and disinfect objects and surfaces

The World Health Organization (WHO) also advises:
When visiting live markets in areas currently experiencing cases of novel coronavirus, avoid direct unprotected contact with live animals and surfaces in contact with animals
The consumption of raw or undercooked animal products should be avoided. Raw meat, milk or animal organs should be handled with care, to avoid cross-contamination with uncooked foods, as per good food safety practices."

It is also recommended to sleep at least 1 m (3 ft) away from anyone with any respiratory infection.

Face masks:
While the Chinese authorities have required people to wear face masks in public, their efficacy has not been demonstrated.

According to an NPR interview, face masks may bring value as they prevent people from touching their mouth or nose but “they will not necessarily prevent infection.” Anyone regularly exposed to someone with a confirmed infection and those who are coughing should wear a mask to limit spread.

Vaccine:
There are currently no vaccines available.

Testing:
Testing for patients for 2019-nCoV is very limited. There is no commercially available test currently available. In the USA, the US CDC is performing all testing and is limiting availability to patients who are symptomatic with a history or possible exposure by contacts or travel history.

Questions? Comments?
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