

US bans foreign nationals from entry over coronavirus

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The Trump administration's Health and Human Services Secretary, Alex Azar, announced yesterday that he had declared the Wuhan Coronavirus a public health emergency in the United States. The order will go into effect beginning at 5:00 p.m. on February 2. It means that any American citizen who had been in China's Hubei province in the past 14 days will be placed under a mandatory 14 days quarantine if they travel back to the US.

Additionally, Azar declared: "Foreign nationals, other than the immediate family of US citizens and permanent residents, who have traveled in China in the last 14 days will be denied entry into the United States."

Dr. Nancy Messonnier, director of the National Center for Immunizations and Respiratory Diseases, told reporters at Center for Disease Control and Prevention conference: "The CDC under the statutory authority of the HHS secretary has issued federal quarantine orders for all 195 passengers" who were evacuated from Wuhan. "While we recognize this is an unprecedented action, we are facing an unprecedented public health threat." The people are presently being held at the March Air Reserve Base in Riverside County, California.

The last time the US health officials issued a mandatory quarantine was for a smallpox outbreak that occurred in the 1960s. This was a period in which the globe was engaged in measures to eradicate the virus from every country, beginning in 1950 by the Pan American Health Organization. It was estimated more than two million people were dying from smallpox every year.

Dr. Messonnier stated: "This is one of the tools in our toolbox to mitigate the potential impact of this novel virus on the United States. We are preparing as if this

were the next pandemic, but we are hopeful still that this is not and will not be the case."

On Thursday, the first person-to-person transmission was confirmed, the husband of the Chicago woman who acquired the infection when she was visiting Wuhan. Public health officials reported that they are monitoring 21 patients in Illinois. Hospitals and medical centers are being briefed on protocols for handling and reporting of respiratory infections. A person who returned from Wuhan on January 24 has been diagnosed as infected with the virus in Santa Clara County, California.

The number infected globally has surpassed 10,000 individuals. This is an increase of 2,000 over 24 hours, with an additional 45 deaths, all in Hubei province, bringing the number fatalities across China to 258 thus far. Currently, more than 20 countries and territories outside of mainland China have confirmed cases. Every province in China has been affected. The United Kingdom has now confirmed two individuals infected with the novel coronavirus.

Though it remains to be determined, some economists have predicted that the outbreak will cause China's growth rate to drop by two percentage points this quarter. In real economic terms, this means an expected loss of \$62 billion. The People's Bank of China has ensured that there is sufficient liquidity in the financial markets when they reopen after the Lunar New Year holiday period. To place this in context, the World Bank estimated that the 2003 SARS epidemic cost some \$54 billion.

Three major US airline carriers, Delta, American and United, are discontinuing services to China, at least through the end of March. Their share prices have fallen between 2 and 4 percent due to concerns over the burgeoning epidemic and the impact it will have on

travel, with severe restrictions now being imposed by nearly every major country.

Meanwhile, the Dow Jones Industrial Average plummeted 603 points to 28,169.53, recording the biggest one day fall since August. Fears of the impact caused by the epidemic on economic growth have shaken financial sectors. Losses have been led by energy and material firms which derive much of their revenue from the Chinese economy. Crude oil prices continued to fall with American oil falling below \$52 a barrel.

Starbucks has closed more than half of its 4,000 stores in China. Car manufacturers, including Toyota and Hyundai, have said they will delay resuming production. Even Apple has issued cautionary advice that the epidemic may have an impact on the manufacturing of its products.

On Thursday, the World Health Organization (WHO), under international pressure, declared that the novel coronavirus epidemic had become a serious global threat. Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus praised China's effort to contain the epidemic and accept international assistance and told reporters that the declaration was intended to halt the spread of the virus to countries that did not have the "robust health resources as China."

Though the declaration does not impose restrictions on any country's economic transactions or travels—and WHO went so far as to emphasize it did not recommend limiting trade, travel, border closures, quarantines, or visa denials—it has had exactly that effect. It signaled to investors that the epidemic was not under control. The result of the uncertainty created panic in the markets and saw the Dow Jones drop more than two percent.

In revealing comments by Antoine Flahault, director of the Institute of Global Health in Geneva said just before WHO declared the global emergency: "Since human-to-human transmission is now established outside China, as soon as it is considered as sustained transmission chains, the WHO will declare a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). As with all UN organizations, there are political games. Of course, the bigger the player, the more intense and powerful the pressure."

The virus is being exploited to stoke anti-Chinese xenophobia in a number of countries. Rather than

addressing the dire concerns in Wuhan and the Hubei province through international cooperation, petitions for banning Chinese nationals from entering have been launched in Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea. In Vietnam, some businesses have posted signs that Chinese customers are not welcome. In Australia, the Murdoch-owned *Herald Sun* in Melbourne ran a lurid front-page headline "Chinese Virus Pandemonium." French newspaper *Le Courrier Picard* was compelled to apologize after running a racist headline labelling the virus a "Yellow Alert."



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