

WHO says coronavirus danger is “very high”

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The World Health Organization (WHO) has upgraded its assessment of the danger posed by the coronavirus to “very high,” stopping short of calling the outbreak a pandemic. Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at a recent press conference, “For the moment, we are not witnessing the uncontained global spread of this virus, and we are not witnessing large-scale severe death or disease.” The coronavirus has now been documented in at least 56 countries.

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the 2019-nCoV virus has caused death resulting from the illness as well as sustained person-to-person spreading. The worldwide spread is the third criterion in defining a contagion as a pandemic. According to Dr. Mike Ryan, executive director of the World Health Organization, “If we say there’s a pandemic of coronavirus, we’re essentially accepting that every human on the planet will be exposed to that virus.”

These statements reflect the WHO’s belief that containment measures can still bring the “epidemic” under effective control. However, as the number of cases outside of mainland China continues to outpace China, with new countries being added to the growing list of countries that have confirmed cases of Covid-19, it seems that time is of the essence. Still, some countries like Vietnam, Nepal and Singapore, as well, more recently, as China, have shown early indications that the infection has slowed or stopped.

A declaration of a pandemic would trigger emergency-grade response plans at local and state levels. These measures would include school closures, the use of essential personnel only, the use of telecommunications for the conduct of business, the closure of public events – sporting events, conferences, political rallies and conventions – and the possible use of massive quarantine measures, to include the deployment of military or police forces to enforce regulations. These

measures have been employed by many nations that are essentially preparing for massive outbreaks in their communities.

The last time the WHO declared a pandemic was in 2009 when the H1N1 flu, better known as the swine flu, infected over 1 billion people on the globe and killed over half a million people. The WHO was severely criticized for its declaration of a pandemic and handling of the crisis. It was cited for the needlessly complex definition of a pandemic, potential conflict of interest with the vaccine industries, and responding with lack of resolve after declaring the pandemic. According to the *New York Times*, “Countries that needed technical help could not obtain it in enough languages, and the WHO bureaucracy created an unmanageable number of documents.”

During a 2011 review of the pandemic, the WHO noted in its draft that the “core national and local capacities called for in the International Health Regulation (IHR) are not yet fully operational and are not now on a path to timely implementation worldwide.” Essentially, the WHO lacks enforceable sanctions. In other words, it cannot make countries subscribe to its recommendations.

In its summary conclusion 3, the WHO wrote that the world is “ill-prepared to respond to a severe influenza pandemic or any similarly global, sustained and threatening public health emergency.” It continued: “Beyond the implementation of core public health capacities called for in the IHR, global preparedness can be advanced through research, strengthened health care delivery systems, economic development in low- and middle-income countries and improved health status.”

There are presently 84,175 cases of Covid-19, with 2,876 deaths so far. The number of people who have recovered from the disease is 36,884.

The three countries posing serious acceleration in

cases - Iran, Italy and South Korea – reported more than 3,500 infections on Friday, doubling in two days. On Friday, Iran had 388 cases (+143 from the day before) with 34 deaths (+8); Italy had 889 (+234) with 21 deaths (+4); South Korea had 2,337 (+571) with 16 deaths (+3).

The high number of deaths in Iran is worrisome, as it suggests the epidemic is much more expansive than reported. Additionally, a case confirmed in Nigeria has the WHO worried that the outbreak could take a foothold in Africa, which could have devastating consequences. China has had only eight new cases and no new deaths.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average has lost over 3,200 points in one week, suffering its worst week since the financial crisis in 2008. Goldman Sachs has told its investors that it does not expect US companies to generate earnings growth in 2020. The warning by the CDC that it is only a matter of time when the coronavirus will impact the US has sent the markets into a panic. Supply chains are almost non-existent and production and shipping have come to a grinding halt.

A high-ranking whistleblower informed the *Washington Post* that federal health employees sent to Travis Air Force Base to assist with quarantined evacuees from Japan openly interacted with them without proper medical training or protective gear.

This followed news that a California woman, currently in critical condition at UC Davis Medical Center, had been infected with no direct link to anyone traveling from the affected countries, raising the suspicion that the source of her infection may have come from someone at Travis, which is nearby. It is unclear if any of the Department of Health and Human Services personnel were contaminated or are the source of the infection in California. A second person, in Santa Clara County, has now been identified without any links, heightening the suspicion that the infection is taking hold there.

The US Navy also confirmed on Friday that it had ordered ships in the Pacific Fleet that have traveled to affected countries, approximately 30 to 40 vessels, to remain at sea for 14 days while the several thousand sailors are monitored for signs of infection. One American soldier based in Daegu, South Korea has tested positive for Covid-19.

Meanwhile, new infections are erupting in Europe.

France and Germany are reporting new cases without travel links, suggesting the infection, given its two-week incubation period, has become well established in these regions. Mexico has also confirmed its first case.

It is highly likely that the WHO will be compelled to declare a pandemic.



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