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WHO Advice for International Travel and Trade in Relation to the Outbreak of Pneumonia Caused by a New Coronavirus in China

On 31 December 2019, a cluster of pneumonia of unknown etiology was reported in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China. On 9 January Chinese authorities reported in the media that the cause of this viral pneumonia was initially identified as a new type of coronavirus, which is different from any other human coronaviruses discovered so far. Coronaviruses are a large family of respiratory viruses that can cause diseases ranging from the common cold to the Middle-East Respiratory Syndrome and the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

The clinical signs and symptoms of the patients reported in this cluster are mainly fever, with a few patients having difficulty in breathing, and chest radiographs showing bilateral lung infiltrates. Some cases were operating dealers or vendors in Huanan Seafood Market. From the currently available information, preliminary investigation suggests that there is no significant human-to-human transmission, and no infections among health care workers have occurred. More information is required to better understand the mode of transmission and clinical manifestation of this new virus. The source of this new virus is not yet known.

On 23 January 2020, the number of reported confirmed cases of 2019-nCoV has increased by 267 cases since the last situation report published on 22 January 2020. As of 23 January 2020, China reported cases in 25 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities). Twenty-five percent of confirmed cases reported by China have been classified by Chinese health authorities as seriously ill (from Wubei Province: 16% severely ill, 5% critically ill, and 4% having died).

Currently, cases infected in China have been exported to the US, Thailand, Japan and Republic of Korea. It is expected that more cases will be exported to other countries, and that further transmission may occur.

It is clear the growing outbreak is no longer due to ongoing exposures at the Huanan seafood market in Wuhan; as in the last one week, less than 15% of new cases reported having visited Huanan market. There is now more evidence that 2019-nCoV spreads from human- to- human and also across generations of cases. Moreover, family clusters involving persons with no reported travel to Wuhan have been reported from Guangdong Province. There have been very few reports of hospital outbreaks or infections of health care workers, which is a prominent feature of MERS and SARS.

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WHO assesses the risk of this event to be very high in China, high at the regional level and moderate at the global level.

International travellers: practice usual precautions

While the cause of the pneumonia seems to be a novel coronavirus, transmission potential and modes of transmission remain unclear. Therefore, it would be prudent to reduce the general risk of acute respiratory infections while travelling in or from affected areas (currently Wuhan City) by:

- avoiding close contact with people suffering from acute respiratory infections;
- frequent hand-washing, especially after direct contact with ill people or their environment;
- avoiding close contact with live or dead farm or wild animals;
- travellers with symptoms of acute respiratory infection should practice cough etiquette (maintain distance, cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or clothing, and wash hands).

Health practitioners and public health authorities should provide to travellers information to reduce the general risk of acute respiratory infections, via travel health clinics, travel agencies, conveyance operators and at points of entry.

If a traveller on board of an aircraft/a ship has signs and symptoms indicative of acute respiratory infections, the model of Maritime declaration of health (Annex 8 of IHR) or the health part of the aircraft general declaration (Annex 9 of IHR) can be used to register the health information onboard and submit to POE health authorities when required by a State Party.

A passenger locator form can be used in the event of a sick traveller detected on board a plane. This form is useful for collecting contact information for passengers and can be used for follow-up if necessary. Travellers should also be encouraged to self-report if they feel ill. The cabin crew should follow the operational procedures recommended by International Air Transport Association (IATA) with regard to managing suspected communicable disease on board an aircraft.

Advice for the Public

WHO's standard recommendations for the general public to reduce exposure to and transmission of a range of illnesses are as follows, which include hand and respiratory hygiene, and safe food practices:

- Frequently clean hands by using alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water;
- When coughing and sneezing cover mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue – throw tissue away immediately and wash hands;

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- Avoid close contact with anyone who has fever and cough;
- If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing seek medical care early and share previous travel history with your health care provider;
- 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.

For the information and guidance of all concerned.



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Administrator

24 January 2020

Sources:

¹WHO International Travel and Health (https://www.who.int/ith/2020-0901_outbreak_of_Pneumonia_caused_by_a_new_coronavirus_in_C/en/)

²Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) advice for the public
(<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>)

³WHO Situation Report 3
(<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports>)

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