



# World Health Organization

WHO Emergencies Coronavirus Emergency Committee Second Meeting

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**Speaker key:**

CL Christian Lindmeier  
DH Professor Didier Houssin  
TAG Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus  
YA Yang  
JK Jamey Keaton  
JL Jérémie Lanche  
KK Kai Kupferschmidt

CL Thank you very much everybody for standing by until this moment, to hear the outcome of the Emergency Committee on the 2019 novel coronavirus meeting. Very glad to have here with me on the podium Professor Didier Houssin, who is the chair of the Emergency Committee, welcome. Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. Dr Mike Ryan, Executive Director for Health Emergencies at WHO. Dr Maria van Kerkhove, Acting Head for Emerging Diseases and Zoonosis. Welcome to all of you.

For those online, please dial 01 on your keypad for questions. We will start with Director-General Dr Tedros to give a short announcement, then we'll hand over to Professor Houssin. Afterwards, we'll have time at this point for very limited amount of questions. We'll take two from the room and two from the phones. I know there are many more questions, but please bear with us, this has been a very long day. So for the panel here, please, we need to share those desk microphones to get everybody on the line. Also to hear us. Thank you very much, and I hand over to Dr Tedros.

TAG Not only a long day, by the way, Tarik. I mean, Christian. It's the default. It's also a long week since last Thursday, how many times have we met? So you must be tired of us. And so we will make it brief. That's why. And apologies also for keeping you waiting.

Good evening to everyone in the room, and to everyone online.

Over the past few weeks, we have witnessed the emergence of a previously unknown pathogen, which has escalated into an unprecedented outbreak, and which has been met by an unprecedented response.

As I have said repeatedly since my return from Beijing, the Chinese government is to be congratulated for the extraordinary measures it has taken to contain the outbreak, despite the severe social and economic impact those measures are having on the Chinese people.

We would have seen many more cases outside China by now - and probably deaths - if it were not for the government's efforts and the progress they have made to protect their own people and the people of the world.

The speed with which China detected the outbreak, isolated the virus, sequenced the genome, and shared it with WHO and the world are very impressive, and beyond words. So is China's commitment to transparency and to supporting other countries.

In many ways, China is actually setting a new standard for outbreak response, and it's not an exaggeration.

I also offer my profound respect and thanks to the thousands of brave health professionals and all front-line responders who in the midst of the spring festival are working 24/7 to treat the sick, save lives, and bring this outbreak under control.

Thanks to their efforts, the number of cases in the rest of the world so far has remained relatively small.

There are now 98 cases in 18 countries outside China, including 8 cases of human-to-human transmission in four countries; Germany, Japan, Vietnam, and the United States of America.

So far we have not seen any deaths outside China, for which we must all be grateful. Although these numbers are still relatively small compared to the numbers of cases in China, we must all act together now to limit further spread.

The vast majority of cases outside of China have a travel history to Wuhan, or contact with someone with a travel history to Wuhan.

We don't know what sort of damage this virus could do if it were to spread in a country with a weaker health system.

We must act now to help countries prepare for that possibility.

For all of these reasons, I'm declaring a Public Health Emergency of International Concern over the global outbreak of novel coronavirus.

The main reason for this declaration is not because of what is happening in China, but because of what is happening in other countries.

Our greatest concern is the potential for the virus to spread to countries with weaker health systems, and which are ill-prepared to deal with it.

Let me be clear. This declaration is not a vote of no confidence in China. On the contrary, WHO continues to have the confidence in China's capacity to control the outbreak.

I'll repeat this. Let me be clear. This declaration is not a vote of no confidence in China. On the contrary. WHO continues to have confidence in China's capacity to control the outbreak.

As you know, I was in China just a few days ago, where I met with President Xi Jinping. I left in absolutely no doubt about China's commitment to transparency and to protecting the world's people.

To the people of China, and to all of those around the world who have been affected by this outbreak, we want you to know that the world stands with you. We are working diligently with national and international public health partners to bring this outbreak under control as fast as possible.

In total, there are now 7834 confirmed cases, including 7736 in China, representing almost 99% of all reported cases worldwide. 170 people have lost their lives to this outbreak, all of them in China.

We must remember that these are people, not numbers.

More important than the declaration of a public health emergency, are the committee's recommendations for preventing the spread of the virus and ensuring a measured and evidence-based response.

I would like to summarise those recommendations in seven key areas.

First, there is no reason for measures that unnecessarily interfere with international travel and trade. WHO doesn't recommend limiting trade and movement.

We call on all countries to implement decisions that are evidence-based and consistent. WHO stands ready to provide advice to any country that's considering which measures to take.

Second, we must support countries with weaker health systems.

Third, accelerate the development of vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics.

Fourth, combat the spread of rumours and misinformation.

Fifth, review preparedness plans, identify gaps, and evaluate the resources needed to identify, isolate, and care for cases, and prevent transmission.

Sixth, share data, knowledge, and experience with WHO and the world.

And seventh, the only way we will defeat this outbreak is for all countries to work together in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation. We are all in this together, and we can only stop it together.

This is the time for facts, not fear.

This is the time for science, not rumours.

This is the time for solidarity, not stigma.

Thank you.

CL Thank you very much, Dr Tedros, and let's hear from the Chair of the Emergency Committee, Professor Houssin.

DH Thank you very much. So now was the time. Today the Emergency Committee almost unanimously concluded that it was now time to suggest to the DG of WHO that the novel coronavirus outbreak is a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. Considering first the increase in the number of cases in China, second, the increase in the number of countries affected with cases. And also that some countries have taken questionable measures concerning travellers.

Thanks to the IHR, our main international health treaty, declaring a Public Health Emergency of International Concern is likely to facilitate WHO leadership role for public health measures, holding countries to account concerning additional measures they may take regarding travel, trade, quarantine or screening, research efforts, global coordination, anticipation of economic impacts, support to vulnerable states.

Declaration of a PHEIC should certainly not be seen as a manifestation of distrust in the Chinese authorities and people, which are doing tremendous efforts on the frontline of this outbreak, with transparency, and let us hope, with success.

Novel coronavirus has placed its crown in several countries. Some are able to try to cope with new cases, for some others it will be more difficult, and declaration of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern should open ways to facilitate this task.

The DG just declared a novel coronavirus event as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. For this purpose the Emergency Committee has formulated advices that could become temporary recommendations concerning WHO, China, and affected or non-affected countries. And this will be detailed in the statement about public health measures, travel, research, international cooperation, and coordination. Thank you.

CL Thank you very much, Professor Houssin. Now we're opening the floor here in the room for two questions, and then we will go online. So then I'll take the first here from the Chinese colleague, please introduce yourself.

YA Es Yang with Xinhua News Agency. I've got two questions for Director-General.

First one, to your knowledge, what are the most extreme measures that some other countries may execute against China after the release of the decision, and how will WHO respond to it? To these drastic measures?

And secondly, as many countries are stepping up to work on the vaccine, what kind of role can WHO play in coordinating international efforts to work and develop the vaccine, and is there a specific timeline for the development of the vaccine? Thank you.

CL Thank you.

TAG As I said it earlier, we should have actually expressed our respect and gratitude to China for what it's doing. It has already done incredible things to limit the transmission of the virus to other countries. And where respect is due, then you don't punish. Meaning if anyone is thinking about taking measures, it's going to be wrong. And WHO doesn't recommend, and actually opposes, any restrictions for travel and trade or other measures against China.

On the vaccine, we have already started, and we have invited relevant partners. And there is progress. And we will inform you as soon as we have detailed information.

CL Thank you. And I'll take a second question from the room. Associated Press, please. Come right now to the table. Thank you.

JK Can you hear me? Hi, this is Jamie from Associate Press. Dr Tedros, thank you very much. Two quick questions. One is, I'm not quite sure about the travel recommendations. It sounds like you and Dr Houssin are saying different things. WHO is not recommending a travel recommendation, but the countries themselves should be allowed to? So how does that all fit together? Because as you know, there are a lot of countries that are already reacting.

And then the second question just has to do with your visit to Xi Jinping. I just want to make sure that we understand when the last time that a DG like you flew to a country to meet with the head of state during an evolving outbreak to request more detailed data and permission. If China was responding transparently and efficiently, why was that necessary? Thank you.

CL Thank you very much, Jamie. Dr Tedros, and possibly also Professor Houssin. Maybe you want to first start with Dr Tedros.

TAG Yes, I would be happy to give the travel... We don't recommend travel or trade restrictions, as WHO. And what I said, and what Professor Houssin said, are actually the same. But I would be glad if Professor also can comment on that. And on my trip to China, I have done it to other countries too, before. So going to the field, visiting countries, having first-hand information, is very important. And that's why I had to visit, to see for myself what's happening. And I came back so impressed.

I have never seen, in my life, this kind of mobilisation. And maybe you're following the Wuhan Hospital which is being built in ten days. Big hospital. But that's not the only thing. You know the measures they are taking, which I believe will reverse the tide. And going there and witnessing that is very important. Witnessing how the leadership is leading the response is very important.

And the other impressive part is, it's the president himself who is leading this effort. And when we arrived, the day we arrived, the prime minister was actually in Wuhan. And all the ministers are involved, relevant ministers. This is impressive. And witnessing that kind of leadership, and interacting with those leaders who're leading an outbreak personally, can get me real experience, for me too. And actually a learning experience. And because of that I

actually recommended to other countries globally to have that kind of political commitment and leadership at the highest level possible. And when that happens, I know things happen on the ground too.

So I think visiting China was a very important one, which is not a new one. Of course, I did it many times to other countries where there were outbreaks and so on. This one was special because I was able to learn many things from what China is doing. And I'm very confident by what they're doing. I have seen the capacity, and I believe that they will control this outbreak as soon as possible. They have all the capacity that needs.

But not only what they're doing is protecting their people, but I know from the figures also, you know that it's protecting the rest of the world. Outside China we only have 98 cases, and no deaths. If strong measures were not taken in China this would not have happened. And that's why I also said we have to appreciate what China is doing. And this declaration, is not actually because China is not doing what it can. It's actually doing more than China is required to do.

This is to protect especially countries with weaker health systems, and to prepare for that. And for your information, during my discussion with the president and other officials, they're willing to support countries with weaker health systems with whatever is possible. I think that is why I said in my speech earlier, in many ways, China is actually setting a new standard for outbreak response. Thank you.

CL Thank you very much, Dr Tedros. And looking at Professor Houssin for your comments on travel and trade recommendations.

DH Yes. What does it mean, a travel restriction? It means, for example, visa refusal, border closure, quarantine of travellers who are in good condition. These travel restrictions, under the declaration of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, they will... This declaration will provide to WHO the possibility to question such measures which already have been taken by some countries.

Why did you take this decision? What is the science supporting this decision? Could you reconsider this decision? And we suggested to WHO that WHO should inform the world about transparency concerning these measures, which should not constitute an example to follow, but a decision to reconsider.

CL Thank you very much, Professor Houssin. With this we'll turn towards our journalist colleagues on the line. By the way, we have more than 150 online right now. I'm looking at Radio France for the first question, and then we will go to Science Magazine, Kai Kupferschmidt. Radio France, please, first.

JL [In French] Oui, bonjour. Jérémie Lanche pour Radio France. Une question peut-être pour le Docteur Houssin. Être plus précis sur les évacuations. Parmi les mesures que vous jugez néfastes qui ont été prises par certains pays, votre opinion précise sur les évacuations et sur la fermeture de certaines liaisons entre les pays occidentaux et la Chine. Je voudrais avoir votre commentaire là-dessus. Est-ce que vous pensez que c'est là aussi des mesures qui sont pas nécessaires et qui sont néfastes ?

CL Thank you, but could you please repeat for the journalists in the room and all our other listeners, your question in English? Thank you.

JL Of course. The question was about the evacuation that was taken from certain countries, among them, France. Do you consider that it is then an unnecessary measure? And also, the fact that some countries, again, France, you have no direct flights now, from Air France, from Paris, to China. Do you consider those measures unnecessary too?

CL Thank you.

TAG Well, the evacuation from the citizens of some countries who are presently in the Hubei province, there are measures that some countries are able to take because they have the capacity to do it, logistically speaking. They also are the proof of some confidence in the capacity they have then to avoid contamination from these persons once they have returned in their national state. So this is why it is a measure that some countries are able to take, but clearly not all countries can do that. It's probably a situation which is a little bit exceptional. This is the only thing I can say about that.

CL Thank you very much, I hope this answers your question. With this, we turn to Science Magazine, Kai Kupferschmidt, please.

KK Thanks. This is probably for Tedros. So I'm curious, we've seen in the Ebola outbreak in West Africa as well, that the countries take these unilateral decisions to close borders or refuse visa and things like that. Other than questioning about the evidence base for this, are you doing anything in the background to actually change this, or specifically also on British Airways or Air France flights, is there anything that you can actually do as WHO to change this?

CL Dr Tedros, please.

TAG I think we will do everything, so people can do the right thing. With the flights, we may not be able to convince them, because some of the airlines actually said that they are not flying. It's not because of the virus, because they don't have enough passengers. And that could be a reason, and it will be very difficult if that's the case. Otherwise we engage and through this declaration, by the way, through the recommendations, we expect that they will follow that. But at the same time, we will continue to engage. Thank you.

CL Thank you very much, gentlemen, ladies, on the panel. With this we reached the end of our press briefing. Everybody, thank you very much to all the many listeners online, and to the large crowd here in the room. I thank the panel, thank you all very much.

For everybody, we will be sending the audio files very shortly after this, together with the statement and the intervention by Dr Tedros, and some time later maybe also video clips and for the transcript, we will most likely only send in the course of tomorrow.

Thank you all very much, have a good evening.

TAG Thank you.