

China coronavirus death toll jumps to 25



Beijing, January 24 (RHC)-- China has locked down 10 cities at the hub of a new coronavirus outbreak that has killed 25 people and infected at least 830, as health authorities around the world took action to prevent a global pandemic. The lockdowns on new cities encompass more than 20.5 million people.

The World Health Organization (WHO) acknowledged that the respiratory illness is an emergency in China, but said it is too early to declare it a global one. Health officials fear the transmission rate will accelerate as hundreds of millions of Chinese travel at home and abroad during week-long holidays for the Lunar New Year, which begins on Saturday.

The number of cases of patients infected with the new coronavirus as of January 23 has gone up to 830, while the death toll from the virus has risen to 25, the National Health Commission announced on Friday. The virus originated in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in Hubei late last year and has spread to other Chinese cities including Beijing and Shanghai, as well as the United States, Thailand, South Korea and Japan. Earlier on Friday, Japan confirmed a second case of coronavirus.

Meanwhile, another city near Wuhan halted transport on Friday and closed its river bridge as the country escalates efforts to contain the disease. Huangshi city in Hubei province announced that transport routes and a ferry terminal was shut down starting at 0200 GMT on Friday. In all, at least 10 cities have already been ordered on lockdown.

On Thursday, Singapore confirmed its first case of the coronavirus strain, which originated in China, and said another case has preliminarily tested positive. Singapore suffered 33 deaths due to SARS, making it one of the worst hit countries outside China.

"We are well prepared, because we have been gearing up for such a situation ever since we dealt with SARS in 2003," Lee Hsien Loong said in an annual Chinese New Year speech. "MOH (Ministry of Health) has now activated plans to counter the spread of the virus, which so far does not appear to be as deadly as SARS was."

China's Huanggang, Xiantao and Ezhou cities have joined Wuhan in shutting down railway stations and suspending long-distance buses as well as ferry services, according to statements on the cities' websites and state media.

Playgrounds in Xiantao have been closed, as have markets with live birds and entertainment venues. The smaller city of Chibi said public transport and connections to other places would be suspended from midnight (16:00 GMT).

China's capital city, Beijing, cancelled important public events including two well-known Lunar New Year temple fairs, the state-run Beijing News said, as authorities try to curb the spread of a deadly coronavirus outbreak.

Separately, the country's railway operator, China State Railway Group, said passengers would be able to receive full refunds on tickets nationwide starting on Friday.

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25



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