

# Act on the Novel Coronavirus Immediately!

by Debra H. Freeman, DrPH

Feb. 2—Late on Friday, January 31, the Trump administration [declared](#) the coronavirus outbreak to be a public health emergency in the United States. At the time of the declaration, only seven Americans had contracted the virus. As of this writing the number has risen to eight. The declaration follows the [declaration](#) of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) a day earlier.

The declaration by the WHO, as reported in this publication, praised China's extraordinary effort to contain the outbreak, and was clearly specifically intended to unleash international assistance to other countries with far less robust public health and medical capabilities that might also be affected.

The U.S. public health emergency designation itself wasn't surprising. However, some of the measures that accompanied the declaration were highly unusual.

One hundred ninety-five Americans evacuated from China's Hubei Province have been confined to a California military air base for seventy-two hours of health screenings followed by a mandatory fourteen-day quarantine. The Pentagon announced on Saturday that it had approved a request from the Department of Health and Human Services for housing an additional 1,000 people through February 29. The Pentagon statement added that four military installations—two in California, one in Colorado, and one in Texas—were currently being readied to



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*As a precaution to contain the novel coronavirus, health authorities have closed the Huanan Wholesale Seafood Market in Wuhan, China.*

accept people.

The action marks the first mandatory quarantine order the U.S. has issued in more than fifty years. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the last time a quarantine was used was in the 1960s for smallpox.

Alex Azar, Secretary of Health and Human Services and chairman of the coronavirus task force set up by the administration, also announced that, for at least the next fourteen days, U.S. entry would be denied to all foreign nationals who had recently been in China. This does not apply to U.S. citizens and permanent residents. Those arriving from Hubei, of which Wuhan is the capital, will have to undergo a fourteen-day mandatory quarantine upon arrival, while those arriving from any other part of China must undergo



HHS

*Alex Azar, U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary, signing the Public Health Emergency Declaration for the coronavirus in the U.S. on January 31, 2020.*



cc/China News Service

*Infrared cameras in Wuhan's railway station check passengers' body temperature before allowing them to board the trains.*

mandatory screening and monitoring.

China [criticized](#) the move; Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said it went against WHO recommendations—not to impose travel bans:

A friend in need is a friend indeed. Many countries have offered China support in various means. In sharp contrast, certain U.S. officials' words and actions are neither factual nor appropriate.

### The Situation on the Ground in China

So, what is the actual situation?

U.S. cases reported remain at eight, and federal health officials continue to emphasize that the risk to Americans remains low. On Sunday, the first death outside of China was reported in the Philippines.

In China itself, despite extraordinary and unprecedented measures to contain the virus, the number of new cases continues to rise rapidly. According to official statistics released Friday, the number of new confirmed cases rose tenfold in just the past week. Between Saturday and Sunday, over 2,000 new cases were confirmed, bringing the total number of confirmed cases to 14,400. Three hundred and five people have died.

A new, peer-reviewed [study](#) by University of Hong

Kong scientists, published January 31 in the medical journal *The Lancet*, said the outbreak could be even worse than it appears and could get dramatically worse over the next week or two. They estimated that 75,815 people in Wuhan have likely been infected as of January 25—nearly eight times the number of reported cases. The study estimated that, even accounting for the containment measures China has taken, infected people would pass the virus to two to three others, on average, meaning the infected population would double every 6.4 days.

Xinhua, the official China news agency, reports that the People's Liberation Army sent 1,400 medical staff from the armed forces to Wuhan on Sunday to treat patients at the new 1,000-bed Huoshenshan Hospital, which was built in just ten days and is due to open February 3. Two other new hospitals, capable of handling an additional 2,000 patients each, are under construction and ex-



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*Chinese citizens registering to be admitted to one of the purpose-built hospitals in Wuhan that have just been completed.*

pected to begin operations within the next week.

### The World Begins to Mobilize

Meanwhile, since January 10 when China publicly released the genetic sequence of the new virus, an intense international effort has been underway to learn more about the new virus and develop a vaccine as rap-



as in the confirmed modes of transmission and overall virulence of the virus, seem to indicate that the virus itself is changing or mutating. So far, at least five different strains have been identified.

Yes, there have been some important scientific advances made in the effort to arrest the spread of the novel coronavirus, but greater international collaboration is urgently required. Attempts to use the situation to intensify an adversarial relationship between the U.S. and China must be brought to a rapid halt. One such example is the absolutely asinine statements

China has completed the construction of two new 1,000-bed hospitals in Wuhan in less than ten days each (with a third on the way), to cope with the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

made by Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, who in an interview with Fox Business Network said:

I don't want to talk about a victory lap over a very unfortunate, very malignant disease, but I

idly as possible. Researchers believe they may have made significant progress in finding an effective method of immunization.

A research team at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Maryland said it had prepared a modified version of a key section of the virus to encourage the body to produce antibodies against the disease. The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) has announced it would commit \$11 million to three programs led by the companies Inovio Pharmaceuticals and Moderna, and the University of Queensland, with the hope of having a viable vaccine in production within sixteen weeks, although testing for safety and efficacy will take much longer.

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A coronavirus patient being wheeled into Wuhan's Huoshenshan Hospital's negative pressure ward.

Much of the research builds on work done during the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak that first emerged in China in 2001, another coronavirus thought to be similar to the Wuhan virus. But research is still at an early stage, and there are no guarantees that any of the designs developed so far will be safe and effective enough to be used in the current outbreak in China.

think it will help to accelerate the return of jobs to North America. Some to U.S., probably some to Mexico, as well.

The issue is also complicated by the fact that the dramatic escalation in the numbers of infected, as well

Other top American health experts have insisted that the federal government's resources and energies are



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Wuhan's new purpose-built Huoshenshan Hospital begins accepting patients.

better spent restoring America's public health infrastructure rather than on imposing travel bans.

Dr. Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (CIDRAP) and an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota Medical School, [told Minnpost](#):

Every health care organization in the country should be dusting off any of their plans they've ever had for mass infection events like this where they need to hospitalize many more patients.

Dr. Osterholm observed that at present, hospitalizations from just the yearly flu season are taxing hospital bed resources. Further,

If there are mass outbreaks, it's not as though FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) will be able to set up everywhere to add beds. It's not just beds that could be in short supply. Many common drugs that are acutely needed are manufactured in China, and some of them already face shortages. If China shuts down

Carney (among other participants at the recent bankers confab in Davos) have long sought, to depopulate the planet.

### Schiller Institute Call for a Four-Power Summit

Schiller Institute President Helga Zepp-LaRouche issued a [call](#) January 6 for a summit among Presidents Trump, Putin, and Xi, to initiate a New Paradigm of relations among all nations, addressing the great issues of war and peace through cooperation on the common aims of humanity. This current global health emergency makes such a meeting even more urgent, and with the participation of India's Prime Minister Modi.

Joint action, led personally by the leaders of these great nations, is needed to ensure that

adequate resources are mobilized internationally so that nations can provide for even their most poor, limit the virus' spread, and initiate the broadest scientific cooperation possible, so that appropriate measures to contain and cure this current virus can be found and implemented in the shortest time possible.



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Dr. Michael Osterholm, Director of the University of Minnesota's Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy.

## Witnessing an Unprecedented Mobilization to Save Lives

*A press conference called by the World Health Organization (WHO) presented its decision on January 30, 2020, declaring that the “the novel coronavirus outbreak” in China is a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, “to enable international coordinated cooperation to cope with it in all its ramifications.”*

*Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director General of the WHO spoke, along with other colleagues, and took questions from two reporters there and two from the online audience. We present here an edited excerpt from his exchange with a reporter from the Associated Press (AP). Dr. Tedros highly praised the medical and political leadership he saw in his just completed trip to China. The full audio of the 25-minute press conference is available [here](#).*



*Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General of the World Health Organization.*

**Jamie, from Associated Press:** Dr. Tedros, thank you very much... The second question just has to do with your visit to [Chinese President] Xi Jinping. I just want to make sure that we understand when the last time that a DG [Director General] like you flew to a country to meet with the head of state during an evolving outbreak to request more detailed data and permission. Why was that necessary? And, if China was responding transparently and efficiently, why was that necessary? Thank you.

**Dr. Tedros:** Thank you very much Jamie... 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. 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 mobilization. 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. Going there and witnessing that is very important. Witnessing how the leadership is leading the response is very important.

The other impressive part is, it’s the President himself who is leading this effort. The day that we arrived the Prime Minister was actually in Wuhan. And all the ministers are involved, relevant ministers. This is impressive. Witnessing that kind of leadership and interacting with those leaders who’re leading an outbreak [response] personally, [provided] me real experience, and actually a learning experience.

I recommended to other countries globally to have that kind of political commitment and leadership at the highest level possible. When that happens, I know things happen on the ground too. So, I think visiting China was very important. I many times [have visited] other countries where there were outbreaks. 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 is needed. 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.

That’s why I also said we have to appreciate what China is doing. This declaration is not 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. 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. That is why I said in my speech earlier, in many ways, China is actually setting a new standard for outbreak response.