

Health officials step up travel warnings, airport screening amid coronavirus outbreak in China

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Editor's note: For the latest coverage of coronavirus, visit <https://www.aapublications.org/news/2020/01/28/coronavirus>.

Federal health officials are warning people to avoid unnecessary travel to China and are increasing screening of passengers returning from the country in light of a rapidly spreading coronavirus.

Nancy Messonnier, M.D., director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, said the screenings will take place via quarantine stations at 20 U.S. airports, up from five. The screenings aim to identify people who are sick and educate those who may develop symptoms later, including fever, cough and difficulty breathing.

"We want travelers to understand even if they don't have symptoms when they come back to the United States if they develop symptoms, they should contact their health care provider immediately," Dr. Messonnier said.

She and leaders of other federal health agencies held a news conference Tuesday to give an update on the recommendations and steps officials are taking to prevent widespread illness in the U.S.

The CDC has issued a level 3 travel advisory warning against unnecessary travel to China, and the U.S. State Department has issued a level 4 warning not to travel to Hubei province, the center of the outbreak.

The expanded warnings and screenings come as more than 4,500 cases of the respiratory virus have been confirmed in China and more than 100 people have died. Cases have been identified in 18 additional international locations, including the U.S. The U.S. has confirmed five cases in Arizona, California, Illinois and Washington all of whom had traveled to Wuhan, China. Another 73 people are awaiting test results.

Experts around the globe are studying the virus' severity, incubation period and modes of transmission. Some early research has suggested an infected person infects 1.5 to 3.5 other people, compared to an extremely infectious disease like measles in which one person typically infects 12-18 others, according to Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, J.D.

There has been reported evidence of person-to-person transmission of novel coronavirus in China, but not in the U.S. China also has reported asymptomatic transmission, but U.S. officials have not been able to

confirm that.

“All of these questions must and will be answered in order to provide a proper risk assessment, but they are not stopping us from focusing on applying tried and true public health methods in the meantime,” Azar said.

Federal health officials said they are working on three types of interventions – diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines. They plan to distribute diagnostic tests to domestic and international partners in the next couple of weeks and hope to have a vaccine in a phase 1 trial in the next three months.

The CDC has been pushing for its experts to be allowed into China to help contain and study the virus. The World Health Organization announced Tuesday that China has agreed to allow international experts.

Azar asked health care providers to be vigilant for patients who have traveled to China and have a fever and respiratory symptoms. Full CDC guidance is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/clinical-criteria.html> and is expected to be updated later this week.

In addition to the warnings about travel, officials recommend the general public avoid respiratory illnesses by washing their hands, covering their mouths when coughing and staying home when they are sick. Buying masks is not necessary.

Azar called the outbreak a “very fast moving, constantly changing situation.”

“Americans should know that this is a potentially very serious public health threat,” he said, “but at this point Americans should not worry for their own safety.”

Resources

- [The CDC will hold a webinar on coronavirus at 2 p.m. EST on Jan. 31. Information is available at https://emergency.cdc.gov/coca/calls/2020/callinfo_013120.asp.](https://emergency.cdc.gov/coca/calls/2020/callinfo_013120.asp)
- [Information from the CDC on coronavirus](#)
- [CDC travel advisory for China](#)
- [Information from the World Health Organization on coronavirus](#)
- [Information from the AAP Red Book](#)
- [Information for parents from HealthyChildren.org on coronavirus](#)

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