

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Written Question Received 11 September 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000631

Internal briefings provided to CMO and Minister for Health in January 2020

Written

Senator: Katy Gallagher

Question:

In relation to the Department's answer to QoN IQ20-000252 submitted through this Committee on 22 May:

- a. Please provide all other internal health briefings provided to the CMO and the Health Minister in January 2020.
- b. On what dates was the Minister "apprised of the situation through internal briefings"

Answer:

The table lists the chronology of coronavirus developments in January 2020, including stakeholder briefings and daily coronavirus situation reports provided to the Chief Medical Officer and the Minister for Health.

Attachment A: Event Update

Attachment B: Stakeholder Update 10-1-2020

Attachment C: Stakeholder Update: 17-1-2020

COVID-19 NIR Chronology	
Date	Event/Action
31 Dec 2019	Cluster of pneumonia of unknown aetiology in Wuhan, China, reported to the World Health Organization (WHO).
01 Jan 2020	Huanan Seafood Market, Wuhan, China closed for environmental sanitation and disinfection.
	The National Incident Room (NIR) begins monitoring of pneumonia cluster in Wuhan.

03 Jan 2020	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) notifies NIR of a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan, China.
05 Jan 2020	WHO event created and information provided to member states.
06 Jan 2020	Department of Health convened an internal Incident Monitoring Meeting to discuss the cluster
07 Jan 2020	WHO event information distributed within OHPR, including to the CMO and Deputy CMO.
09 Jan 2020	NIR Event Update 1 distributed to stakeholders.
10 Jan 2020	NIR Stakeholder Update 1 distributed to the Minister and whole of government (WoG) stakeholders.
13 Jan 2020	WHO event update distributed within OHPR.
17 Jan 2020	International OHPR Rapid Assessment Team meeting. NIR Stakeholder Update 2 distributed to the Minister and WoG stakeholders.
20 Jan 2020	The NIR began preparing daily coronavirus situation reports, which were distributed daily to the Minister and WoG stakeholders. AHPPC meeting convened to discuss recent developments.
23 Jan 2020	CMO convened an emergency teleconference of AHPPC.
24 Jan 2020	CMO convenes a teleconference of AHPPC.
25 Jan 2020	The Minister for Health, the Hon Greg Hunt MP held a meeting with State and Territory Health Ministers.
28 Jan 2020	CMO <u>convened a meeting of AHPPC</u> to discuss advice for schools and universities.
29 Jan 2020	CDNA and AHPPC met to <u>consider the reports of asymptomatic transmission</u> , and the impact on Australia's current emergency response.



Australian Government

Department of Health
National Incident Room

Viral Pneumonia - China

Report Details

Report Type	Event Update
Issued	2020-01-09
Reference	NIR #2238
Update	1

Key Points

- Public media reporting suggests genetic sequencing has confirmed that the causative agent of the cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan, Hubei Province China is a novel coronavirus.
- To date there has been 44 hospitalised cases of viral pneumonia in Wuhan reported to Australia's National Focal Point (World Health Organization (WHO) Event Information Site report 05 January 2020) However, open source media is reporting 59 cases (09 January 2020).
- There appears to be a common epidemiological link, where those affected attended (as vendors, traders or customers) a live seafood market. Media is reporting that the market also sold birds, other animals and organs from wildlife.
- Chinese health authorities have implemented monitoring, control and prevention measures including contact tracing, isolation of cases and public risk communications. The market was closed and has undergone environmental sanitation and disinfection.
- There is no evidence of ongoing human to human transmission at this time. Additionally, there has been no reported transmission to health care workers.
- There has been no reported deaths linked to this outbreak.
- Investigation and laboratory testing in China is ongoing.
- The Department of Health is maintaining a watching brief on this outbreak through information provided by the WHO under the International Health Regulations (IHR) and Australia's National Focal Point; domestic communicable diseases surveillance systems; and publicly accessible information.
- Australia has excellent public health laboratory capacity to test for and identify viral and bacterial agents and strong public health systems and border measures to detect and manage ill travellers.

- High volumes of Chinese nationals undertaking international travel during the upcoming Lunar New Year season has prompted some Asian countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, Thailand and Taiwan to implement increased border surveillance.
- This novel coronavirus is not a Listed Human Disease (LHD) under the *Biosecurity Act 2015*, however existing processes for screening ill travellers at the border will capture individuals presenting with a fever. Should it become necessary, a disease can be determined as an LHD very quickly.
- If travellers returning from China, specifically the Hubei Province, become unwell they should seek medical attention and advice from their General Practitioner.

Response Actions

China

National authorities have reported the following response measures:

- One hundred and twenty-one close contacts have been identified and are under medical observation;
- The follow-up of close contacts is ongoing;
- Pathogen identification and the tracing of the cause is ongoing;
- Wuhan Municipal Health Commission carried out active case finding, and retrospective investigations have been completed;
- Environmental sanitation and further hygiene investigations are under way.
- China has a Physical Containment Level 4 Laboratory, based in Wuhan, where laboratory testing is being undertaken.

Australia

- The National Incident Room is maintaining a watching brief on this outbreak.
- Through the Victoria Infectious Diseases Reference Laboratory, Pathwest (WA) and the Institute for Clinical Pathology and Medical Research (NSW) capability to detect the novel coronavirus is being established.
- No specific measures are recommended for travellers to Australia at this time. This is consistent with the recommendations of the WHO under the IHR.
- Due to the lack of evidence for human-to-human or prolonged transmission, and unknown vector for transmission no changes to Smarttraveller are recommended at this time.
- Relevant outbreak response plans such as the Emergency Response Plan for Communicable Disease Incidents of National Significance and a Series of National Guidelines for Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) are available to guide an initial response should Australia get a case:
 - [https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/7A38C92C483C8B77CA25805E001A402D/\\$File/CDPLAN.pdf](https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/7A38C92C483C8B77CA25805E001A402D/$File/CDPLAN.pdf)
 - [https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/DA7D2B43102293AECA257DC70081C245/\\$File/MERS-CoV-SoNG-sep2015.pdf](https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/DA7D2B43102293AECA257DC70081C245/$File/MERS-CoV-SoNG-sep2015.pdf)
- There is a suite of information about MERS-CoV on the Department of Health's website that could be readily adapted for a novel coronavirus once more is known.
- The National Medical Stockpile holds a store of surgical masks and P2 respirators as a strategic reserve to boost the national response if required.
- The NIR will continue to review any available information on the outbreak and will update advice as and when required.

Additional Background Information

- Human coronaviruses are common throughout the world.
- Common human coronaviruses commonly inhabit the gastrointestinal and respiratory mucosal membranes, and usually cause mild to moderate upper-respiratory tract illnesses, like the common cold as well as diarrhoea.
- Human coronaviruses can sometimes cause lower-respiratory tract illnesses, such as pneumonia or bronchitis. This is more common in people with cardiopulmonary disease, people with weakened immune systems, infants, and older adults.
- Two human coronaviruses, MERS-CoV and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV) have been known to cause severe illness and higher rates of morbidity and mortality. MERS cases continue to occur, primarily in the Arabian Peninsula. No human cases of SARS have been reported anywhere in the world since 2004.
- It is the potential clinical severity of MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV has led to intensified global interest and the heightened concerns around disease transmission.
- SARS-CoV is a Tier 1 Security Sensitive Biological Agent under the Security Sensitive Biological Agents Regulatory Scheme.

Authorised By

Celia Street, FAS Office of Health Protection

Distribution

AHPPC, CDNA, PHLN and NHEMS.

Further Information

This report is issued by the Australian National Focal Point (NFP). The Australian NFP is located in the Office of Health Protection at the Australian Government Department of Health and its activities are supported 24/7 by the National Incident Room. The Australian NFP is established under the *National Health Security Act 2007*.

For more information on the event(s) in this report, contact the NFP at _____ or _____



Australian Government

Department of Health
National Incident Room

Viral Pneumonia - China

Report Details

Report Type	Stakeholder Update
Issued	2020-01-10
Reference	NIR #2238
Update	1

Key Points

Epidemiological Situation

- Chinese authorities have made a preliminary determination of a novel (or new) coronavirus, identified in a hospitalised person with pneumonia in Wuhan, Hubei Province China¹.
- There are many different coronaviruses that affect humans and animal including for example, coronaviruses that cause the common cold but also more clinical serious conditions such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS).
- To date there has been 44 hospitalised cases of viral pneumonia in Wuhan reported to Australia's National Focal Point (World Health Organization (WHO) Event Information Site report 05 January 2020) However, open source media is reporting 59 cases (09 January 2020).
- There appears to be a common epidemiological link, where those affected attended (as vendors, traders or customers) a live seafood market. Media is reporting that the market also sold birds, other animals and organs from wildlife.²
- Chinese health authorities have implemented monitoring, control and prevention measures including contact tracing, isolation of cases and public risk communications. The market was closed and has undergone environmental sanitation and disinfection.²
- There is no evidence of ongoing human to human transmission at this time. Additionally, there has been no reported transmission to health care workers.²

¹ WHO Statement Regarding Cluster of Pneumonia Cases in Wuhan, China <https://www.who.int/china/news/detail/09-01-2020-who-statement-regarding-cluster-of-pneumonia-cases-in-wuhan-china> - accessed 10 January 2020

² WHO Disease Outbreak News, Pneumonia of unknown cause - China https://www.who.int/csr/don/05-january-2020-pneumonia-of-unknown-cause-china/en/?fbclid=IwAR3dxY_pgmypud1Isir4DxYbIsDnum1WGnoFf_IsyR4PRoOLrC4F1_oww - accessed 10 January 2020

- There has been no reported deaths linked to this outbreak.²
- Investigation and laboratory testing in China is ongoing.

Full detail at [Appendix A](#).

Response Actions

China

National authorities have reported the following response measures:

- One hundred and twenty-one close contacts have been identified and are under medical observation;
- Pathogen identification and the tracing of the cause is ongoing;
- Wuhan Municipal Health Commission carried out active case finding, and retrospective investigations have been completed;
- Environmental sanitation and further hygiene investigations are under way.²

Australia

- The National Incident Room is actively monitoring this outbreak.
- No specific measures are recommended for travellers to Australia at this time. This is consistent with the recommendations of the WHO under the IHR.²

Full detail at [Appendix B](#).

Risk

More comprehensive information is required to understand the current status and epidemiology of the outbreak, and the clinical picture. Further investigations are also required to confirm the source, modes of transmission, extent of infection and any effective medical countermeasures.

Chinese authorities have noted, while the virus in question can cause severe illness in some patients, it does not transmit readily between people.

Australia has excellent public health laboratory capacity to test for and identify viral and bacterial agents and strong public health systems and border measures to detect and manage ill travellers.

Planned Action

Australian National Focal Point (Health)

- The National Incident Room will continue to review any available information on the outbreak and will update advice as and when required.
- More information around human-to-human or prolonged transmission, and potential vectors is needed before a formal risk assessment can be completed.

Authorised By

Celia Street, FAS Office of Health Protection

Distribution

MO (Health, FA, HA, AWR), AHPPC, CDNA, PHLN, NHEMS, Health (OHP SES, OHP MSAU, OHP EL2, IADHB, Media), DAWR, DFAT (Humanitarian, Health Policy, CHS), DIO, HA (ABF, EMA, Health Policy), PM&C

Further Information

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For more information on the event(s) in this report, contact the NFP at _____ or _____

Appendix A: Epidemiological Situation

Situation

- On 31 December 2019, the WHO China Country Office was informed of cases of pneumonia of unknown aetiology (unknown cause) detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China. As of 3 January 2020, a total of 44 patients with pneumonia of unknown aetiology have been reported to WHO by the national authorities in China. Of the 44 cases reported, 11 were severely ill, while the remaining 33 patients are in stable condition.²
- Chinese national authorities report that all patients were isolated and received treatment in Wuhan medical institutions.²
- China has strong public health capacities and resources to respond and manage respiratory disease outbreaks.¹
- Preliminary identification of a novel virus in a short period of time is a notable achievement and demonstrates China's increased capacity to manage new outbreaks and share information.¹
- In addition to treating the patients in care and isolating new cases as they may be identified, public health officials remain focused on continued contact tracing, conducting environmental assessments at the seafood market, and investigations to confirm the identity of the pathogen causing the outbreak.¹
- High volumes of Chinese nationals undertaking international travel during the upcoming Lunar New Year season has prompted some Asian countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, Thailand and Taiwan to implement increased border surveillance.³

Background

- Human coronaviruses are common throughout the world.
- Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses with some causing less-severe disease, such as the common cold, and others more severe disease such as MERS and SARS. Some transmit easily from person to person, while others do not. According to Chinese authorities, the virus in question can cause severe illness in some patients and does not transmit readily between people.¹
- It is the potential clinical severity of MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV has led to intensified global interest and the heightened concerns around disease transmission.

³ China's new virus looms over Lunar New Year travel <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Society/China-s-new-virus-looms-over-Lunar-New-Year-travel> - accessed 10 January 2020

Appendix B: Response Actions**In-Country**

- China has a Physical Containment Level 4 Laboratory, based in Wuhan, where laboratory testing is being undertaken.

Border Measures in Australia

- No specific measures are recommended for travellers to Australia at this time. This is consistent with the recommendations of the WHO under the IHR.
- This novel coronavirus is not an LHD under the *Biosecurity Act 2015*, however existing processes for screening ill travellers at the border will capture individuals presenting with a fever. Should it become necessary, a disease can be determined as an LHD very quickly.

Laboratory Testing in Australia

- The preliminary determination of a novel coronavirus assists with disease detection and response.¹
- Through the Victoria Infectious Diseases Reference Laboratory, Pathwest (WA), Queensland Health Forensic and Scientific Services and the Institute for Clinical Pathology and Medical Research (NSW) there is good capability to test for coronaviruses and capability to detect this novel coronavirus is being established.



Australian Government
Department of Health
 National Incident Room

Viral Pneumonia - China

Report Details

Report Type	Stakeholder Update
Issued	2020-01-17
Reference	NIR #2238
Update	2

Key Points

Epidemiological Situation

- On the 9th January the World Health Organization reported that Chinese authorities had made a preliminary determination of a novel (or new) coronavirus, identified in a hospitalised person with pneumonia in Wuhan, Hubei Province China¹.
- There are many different coronaviruses that affect humans and animal including for example, coronaviruses that cause the common cold but also more clinical serious conditions such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle Eastern respiratory syndrome (MERS).
- As of 16 January, there have been 43 cases preliminarily diagnosed with novel coronavirus. All cases either live or have recent travel history to Wuhan.
 - Of those 43 cases, 41 have been diagnosed in Wuhan China, one in Thailand, and one in Japan.
 - No additional cases have been detected since 3 January 2020 in China.
- Thai health authorities have reported a confirmed case of the novel coronavirus in a Chinese tourist who is a resident of Wuhan and was unwell prior to travelling to Thailand.²

¹ WHO Statement Regarding Cluster of Pneumonia Cases in Wuhan, China <https://www.who.int/china/news/detail/09-01-2020-who-statement-regarding-cluster-of-pneumonia-cases-in-wuhan-china> - accessed 10 January 2020

² WHO Disease Outbreak News, Novel Coronavirus – Thailand (ex- China) <http://origin.who.int/csr/don/14-january-2020-novel-coronavirus-thailand-ex-china/en/> - accessed 17 January 2020

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- On 16 January, Japan reported a confirmed case of the novel coronavirus in a Chinese national who had recently returned from Wuhan, China.³
- There have been two reported deaths. One in a case with severe underlying medical conditions, and the other a case who was 69 years old.²
- There appears to be a common epidemiological link **in most cases**, where those affected attended (as vendors, traders or customers) a live seafood market. Media is reporting that the market also sold birds, bats, other animals and organs from wildlife.⁴
 - The cases identified in Japan and Thailand claim that they had not visited the Huanan South China Seafood Market.
 - A member of a small family cluster in China did not visit the Huanan South China Seafood Market, but is the wife of a market vendor.
- The source of infection remains under investigation.
- Chinese health authorities have implemented monitoring, control and prevention measures including contact tracing, isolation of cases and public risk communications. The market **has been closed since 1 January 2020** and has undergone environmental sanitation and disinfection.⁴
- There is no evidence of ongoing human to human transmission at this time. Additionally, there has been no reported transmission to health care workers.⁴
- Investigation and laboratory testing in China is ongoing.
- To date, there are no reported cases in Australia.
- Australia has excellent public health laboratory capacity to test for and identify the novel coronavirus and strong public health systems in place should a case be identified in Australia.
- The Department of Health, through the National Incident Room, is closely monitoring this situation in collaboration with the World Health Organisation and the states and territories.

Full detail at [Appendix A](#).

Response Actions

China

National authorities have reported the following response measures:

- One hundred and twenty-one close contacts have been identified and are under medical observation;
- Pathogen identification and the tracing of the cause is ongoing;
- Wuhan Municipal Health Commission carried out active case finding, and retrospective investigations have been completed;
- Environmental sanitation and further hygiene investigations are under way.⁴

Australia

- The National Incident Room is actively monitoring this outbreak.
- No specific measures are recommended for travellers to Australia at this time. This is consistent with the recommendations of the WHO under the IHR.⁴

Thailand

³ WHO Disease Outbreak News Novel Coronavirus – Japan (ex-China) <https://www.who.int/csr/don/16-january-2020-novel-coronavirus-japan-ex-china/en/> - accessed 17 January 2020

⁴ WHO Disease Outbreak News, Pneumonia of unknown cause - China https://www.who.int/csr/don/05-january-2020-pneumonia-of-unknown-cause-china/en/?fbclid=IwAR3dxY_pqmycpud1lsjr4DxYblsDnum1WGqnoFf_IsyR4PBQQLrC4F1_oww - accessed 10 January 2020

National authorities have reported the following response measures:

- Screening of travellers from Wuhan at airports;
- Activated enhanced surveillance at public and private hospitals;
- Monitoring identified contacts, including 40 high-risk and 142 low-risk contacts.
- Risk information accessible to the public including a hotline for people returning from the Wuhan with related symptoms.²

Full detail at [Appendix B](#).

Risk

More comprehensive information is required to understand the current status and epidemiology of the outbreak, and the clinical picture. Further investigations are also required to confirm the source, modes of transmission, extent of infection and any effective medical countermeasures.

Chinese authorities have noted, while the virus in question can cause severe illness in some patients, it does not transmit readily between people.

Australia has excellent public health laboratory capacity to test for and identify viral and bacterial agents and strong public health systems and border measures to detect and manage ill travellers.

Planned Action

Australian National Focal Point (Health)

- The National Incident Room will continue to review any available information on the outbreak and will update advice as and when required.
- **Assessment to the risk to Australia and Australians is ongoing.**
- **Information and advice on this outbreak will be published on the Department of Health website shortly.**

Authorised By

Celia Street, FAS Office of Health Protection

Distribution

MO (Health, FA, HA, AWR), AHPPC, CDNA, PHLN, NHEMS, Health (OHP SES, OHP MSAU, OHP EL2, IADHB, Media), DAWR, DFAT (Humanitarian, Health Policy, CHS), DIO, HA (ABF, EMA, Health Policy), PM&C

Further Information

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or

Appendix A: Epidemiological Situation

Situation

- On 31 December 2019, the WHO China Country Office was informed of cases of pneumonia of unknown aetiology (unknown cause) detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China. As of 3 January 2020, a total of 44 patients with pneumonia of unknown aetiology have been reported to WHO by the national authorities in China. Of the 44 cases reported, 11 were severely ill, while the remaining 33 patients are in stable condition.⁴
- Chinese national authorities report that all patients were isolated and received treatment in Wuhan medical institutions.⁴
- China has strong public health capacities and resources to respond and manage respiratory disease outbreaks.¹
- Preliminary identification of a novel virus in a short period of time is a notable achievement and demonstrates China's increased capacity to manage new outbreaks and share information.¹
- In addition to treating the patients in care and isolating new cases as they may be identified, public health officials remain focused on continued contact tracing, conducting environmental assessments at the seafood market, and investigations to confirm the identity of the pathogen causing the outbreak.¹
- High volumes of Chinese nationals undertaking international travel during the upcoming Lunar New Year season has prompted some Asian countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, Thailand and Taiwan to implement increased border surveillance.⁵

Background

- Human coronaviruses are common throughout the world.
- Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses with some causing less-severe disease, such as the common cold, and others more severe disease such as MERS and SARS. Some transmit easily from person to person, while others do not. According to Chinese authorities, the virus in question can cause severe illness in some patients and does not transmit readily between people.¹
- It is the potential clinical severity of MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV has led to intensified global interest and the heightened concerns around disease transmission.

⁵ China's new virus looms over Lunar New Year travel <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Society/China-s-new-virus-looms-over-Lunar-New-Year-travel> - accessed 10 January 2020

Appendix B: Response Actions

China

- China has a Physical Containment Level 4 Laboratory, based in Wuhan, where laboratory testing is being undertaken.

Thailand

- Screening travellers from Wuhan city commenced on 3 January 2020 at Suvarnabhumi Airport, Don Mueang, Phuket and Chiang Mai airports.
- The Ministry of Public Health of Thailand has international-standard diagnosis and medical care, and is closely coordinating with WHO and related departments for the potential response measures.

Border Measures in Australia

- Australia has well established processes in place for screening of ill travellers arriving at our international air and sea ports.
- No international travellers suspected of having coronavirus have been identified at Australian borders.
- No specific measures are recommended for travellers to Australia at this time. This is consistent with the recommendations of the WHO under the IHR.
- Border agencies have been advised to follow existing processes for screening ill travellers arriving at Australia's international air and seaports. This includes identification of ill travellers, isolation and referral to Human Biosecurity Officers where indicated.
- This novel coronavirus is not an LHD under the *Biosecurity Act 2015*, however should it become necessary, a disease can be determined as an LHD very quickly.

Laboratory Testing in Australia

- The preliminary determination of a novel coronavirus assists with disease detection and response.¹
- Through the Victoria Infectious Diseases Reference Laboratory, Pathwest (WA), Queensland Health Forensic and Scientific Services and the Institute for Clinical Pathology and Medical Research (NSW) there is good capability to test for the novel coronavirus.