Transportation shut down in city where new coronavirus originated

Disease control officials in Wuhan, the Chinese city where the outbreak of the new and rapidly spreading virus began, announced that it's shutting down transportation within the city and will close all airports and train stations. The city is home to over 11 million people. By Thursday evening, officials also began closing off the seven million residents of Huanggang, a city about 30 miles east of Wuhan, and nearby Ezhou, a city of one million.

The virus is similar to SARS, which circulated around the world in 2002 and 2003. So far, the new virus has sickened over 500 people and killed 17. In addition to the transportation shutdown, companies like General Motors and Ford are restricting and suspending travel to Wuhan, and Olympic qualifying events have been moved out of the city.

The decision to shut down Wuhan and its two neighboring cities came as the World Health Organization's (WHO) International Health Regulations Committee met in Geneva, Switzerland to decide if it would recommend that the WHO declare an international public health emergency in response to the virus. The committee could not come to a decision – it was split fifty-fifty – and will meet again tomorrow to review additional information on the outbreak, and vote again.

The WHO supports the decision to shut down transportation in and out of Wuhan. "They're taking action they think is appropriate. We stressed to them that by taking a strong action they will not only control the outbreak in their own

country, but will minimize the chance of this outbreak spreading internationally," said director general Tedros Adhanom in a press conference on the ongoing response to the virus. "We commend their actions, but since we have a team on the ground, we will get more information on the situation and the actions being taken," he said.

The chair of the novel coronavirus International Health Regulations Committee, Didier Houssin, said during the press conference that the committee struggled to come to a decision because the information is still limited on both the severity of the illness caused by coronaviruses and the way the virus spreads.

> *The decision about whether or not to declare a public health emergency of international concern on new #coronavirus is one I take extremely seriously, and one I am only prepared to make with appropriate consideration of all the evidence.*
>
> *— Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (@DrTedros) January 22, 2020*

Current evidence suggests that this new coronavirus passes from person to person through close contact. How *well* it passes between people is still unknown. The good news is that no cases where illness has passed from one person through a second person to a third person have been confirmed, said Mike Ryan, executive director of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, during the press conference. "The issues that arise are the unknowns, such as whether there are other routes of transmission. At this time it is not possible to determine that absolutely," he says.

Right now the virus appears to spread person to person similarly to other coronaviruses: people who are sick may pass on the virus to family members or health care workers by sneezing or coughing, through what's called droplet transmission. "If the route is due to close personal contact and droplet transmission, it is containable," Ryan said.

The virus causes a range of symptoms, from mild cold-like symptoms to severe respiratory distress and death. The deaths, though, have been primarily in older adults who also had other conditions (like heart disease) that might have put them more at risk. “The fatality rate is still a question mark. That’s one aspect that we would like to have more information on,” Houssin said.

Update January 23rd, 5:43AM ET: *Article updated with the closing of Wuhan’s neighboring cities.*

https://www.theverge.com/2020/1/22/21077545/coronavirus-transportation-shut-down-wuhan-china-who-emergency-public-health