

26 Feb 2020

COVID-19: update

Advice for travellers to countries/areas affected by COVID-19

- **This updates the news of 25 February 2020**

On the 31st December 2019, the World Health Organization was informed of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause in Wuhan in Hubei province, China [1]. A [novel \(new\) coronavirus](#) was identified as the cause [2]. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses with some causing mild illness, such as the common cold, and others more severe disease such as Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) [3]. The novel coronavirus has been named SARS-CoV-2 and the disease caused by this new virus has been named COVID-19.

As of 25 February 2020 (09:30), 77,658 cases and 2,663 fatalities have been officially reported by the [Chinese National Health Commission](#) from mainland China. According to the Chinese National Health Commission, cases are now reported across all provinces in China; as of 24 February 2020, 83% of cases were in Hubei Province. The Hubei Provincial Health Committee reports that, as of 24 February 2020, 73% of the confirmed cases in Hubei Province were from Wuhan City. This is an evolving situation, and [updates are available from Public Health England](#) (PHE).

In addition, as of 25 February 2020 (09:30), 2,592 cases have been diagnosed in 36 other countries or areas and 2 international conveyances. For information on countries reporting cases see our [Outbreak Surveillance database](#) and [Public Health England](#).

On 30 January 2020 the [International Health Regulations Emergency Committee](#) agreed that the outbreak now meets the criteria for a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

Advice for travellers

There is no vaccine against this novel coronavirus. However, you should take precautions in order to minimise the risk of transmission including:

- Wash hands regularly with soap and water or a disinfectant, especially after coughing and sneezing, before handling and consuming food.
- Use disposable tissues when coughing or sneezing and dispose of used tissues carefully and promptly.
- Avoid close contact with people who appear unwell and avoid sharing personal items.
- Avoid visiting live bird and animal markets, backyard or commercial poultry farms and do not touch wild or domestic birds (alive or dead).
- Avoid any contact with animals, birds or surfaces that may be contaminated with animal or bird droppings.
- Do not eat or handle undercooked or raw meat including poultry, egg or duck dishes.
- PHE recommends against using masks outside clinical settings. Should you decide to use a mask, you should ensure you continue to use all the recommended precautions in order to minimise the risk of transmission.
- Travellers should be aware that direct flights inbound to the UK from countries or areas affected by COVID-19 may be subject to enhanced monitoring, including measures to provide advice to travellers if they feel unwell.

- A number of countries have announced restrictions on entry for travellers from countries affected by COVID-19. Travellers should check the latest FCO travel advice (including entry requirements) for their destination and check with their airline/tour operator before travel.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) advises against all travel to Hubei province, China and it advises against all but essential travel to the rest of mainland China (not including Hong Kong and Macao).

The FCO also advises against all but essential travel to Daegu and Cheongdo in South Korea. [Further information is available from the FCO](#). Please ensure you keep up to date with changing advice as this is a developing situation.

Advice if you have travelled to or transited through Category 1 and Category 2 countries/areas in the last 14 days[^]

Category 1 countries/areas

Wuhan city and Hubei Province (China) ([see map](#))
Iran[^]
Daegu or Cheongdo (South Korea) ([see map](#))[^]
Any Italian town under containment measures
([see map](#))[^]

Category 2 countries/areas

Cambodia[^]
China*
Hong Kong
Italy: north^{^*} ([see map](#))
Japan
Laos[^]
Macao
Malaysia
Myanmar[^]
South Korea^{^*}
Singapore
Taiwan
Thailand
Vietnam[^]

[^]The guidance for Italy, Iran, and Daegu or Cheongdo (South Korea), Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar applies to individuals who returned from these specific areas on or after 19 February 2020.

*Except areas of the country specifically referred to in Category 1.

Category 1 countries/areas:

If you are well, and have returned from these specific areas since 19 February 2020, or have returned from Hubei province China in the past 14 days, follow the [self-isolation advice from PHE](#). Stay indoors and avoid contact with other people as you would with the flu.

Your family do not need to take any precautions or make any changes to their own activities. Call NHS 111 (or regional contacts below) to inform them of your recent travel to the area.

If you become unwell you should follow the [self-isolation advice from PHE](#) and immediately call:

- NHS 111 (England and Wales)
- Public Health Agency 0300 200 7885 (Northern Ireland)
- Your GP or NHS24 111 (Scotland)

Category 2 countries/areas:

If you are well, you do not need to self-isolate. Your family do not need to take any precautions or make any changes to their own activities.

However, if you become unwell within 14 days after return from these countries/areas you should follow the [self-isolation advice from PHE](#) and immediately call:

- NHS 111 (England and Wales)
- Public Health Agency 0300 200 7885 (Northern Ireland)
- Your GP or NHS24 111 (Scotland)

Travellers currently in countries that are reporting cases of COVID-19 should follow local public health advice. UK travellers should also ensure they are up to date with the latest advice from [FCO](#) and [PHE](#).

Advice for health professionals

Public Health England has published information on coronavirus COVID-19, including the information on the [assessment and management of possible cases](#) and [guidance for those working in primary care](#).

In light of the increasing number of cases in China and using existing and widely tested models, the [UK Chief Medical Officers](#) consider it prudent for our governments to escalate planning and preparation in case of a more widespread outbreak. For that reason, they have advised an increase of the UK risk level from low to moderate. This does not mean that the risk to individuals in the UK has changed at this stage, but that government should plan for all eventualities.

Health professionals should remain vigilant for symptomatic individuals who have travelled to (or transited through) affected countries/areas, as listed above. Public Health England has a number of [guidance documents which are available here](#).

Resources

- [COVID-19 \(coronavirus\) in brief](#)
- [World Health Organization: Coronavirus](#)
- [World Health Organization: Statement on the 2nd meeting of the IHR \(2005\) Emergency Committee regarding the outbreak of novel coronavirus](#)
- [Public Health England: Novel coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [BMJ Best Practice: COVID-19](#)

References

1. [World Health Organization. Pneumonia of unknown cause-China. 5 January 2020 \[Accessed 25 February 2020\]](#)
2. [World Health Organization. Novel Coronavirus-China. 12 January 2020 \[Accessed 25 February 2020\]](#)
3. [Public Health England. Novel coronavirus \(COVID-19\): epidemiology, virology and clinical features 26 January 2020. \[Accessed 25 February 2020\]](#)