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**Understanding the virus**

Wuhan, the capital city of the Hubei province and one of the largest cities in central China, is home to famous attractions like the Yellow Crane Tower, Guiyuan Temple, Provincial Museum and East Lake.

Wuhan is China’s three cities – Wuchang, Hanyang and Hankou – merged into one. The city is of immense influence economically, militarily, politically and a major player in China’s developing future. Wuhan is rich in culture and history and has enough cultural relics to keep even the most steadfast tourists busy.

This largest city is also called the ‘Chicago of China’ because it is a hub for transportation and is the site of multiple industrial zones. Many people have immigrated to Wuhan from other areas in and around China, including Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. There are also residents originally from South Korea, the US and Japan. The city has a population of 11 million – more than London or New York.

So what is coronavirus? Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that cause epidemics related to the respiratory tract – from the common cold to acute diseases such as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), according to a report of the World Health Organization (WHO). The name of the virus comes from its shape, which resembles a crown.

The viruses are transmitted from animals to humans, although person-to-person transmission has been confirmed. SARS is believed to be disseminated from civet cats to human whereas MERS travelled from a type of camel to individuals. Studies reveal that the original source of both SARS and MERS-CoV are bats, masked palm cats (native to Asia) and camels respectively.

Initially, a 61-year-old man died from this virus in the central city of China on evening of January 9. This man was a regular buyer at the local seafood market. The health authorities from Wuhan also stated that the patients admitted are mainly common vendors and purchasers. Beyond China now other cases have been recorded in Thailand and in South Korea, Japan, the United States and the UAE.

The first known outbreak of the MERS-CoV infections occurred in April 2012 at a public hospital in Zarqa, Jordan. The first case of MERS CoV in Saudi Arabia was reported in September 2012 but its spread was halted. In response, KSA urgently initiated several investigations and control measures, including multiple collaborations with multiple international partners.

Chinese health authorities have still to track down from where the virus emanate; many think it came from a seafood market. The WHO also reported that an animal source was most likely the primary cause of this virus. The virus is transmitted through the air and the prominent symptoms as claimed by the WHO include fever, cough, headache, sore throat and breathing difficulties while in more extreme cases these can lead to pneumonia, kidney failure or even death. Unfortunately, there is no approved vaccine or antiviral treatment available for this lethal virus.

Wuhan is a gateway to China’s nine provinces which has raised concerns that the new virus can rapidly spread out. How does one grapple with this coronavirus, which has put the world at a high risk? In this regard all public transportation has been suspended in Wuhan. The outbreak is now impacting air travel right around the world. In the US and other counties, officials have announced stepping up protection measures at major airports.

At present, China’s air transport is on high alert as containment efforts are intensifying. In Thailand anyone showing symptoms is quarantined and monitored for 24 hours. Most countries cannot prohibit people from traveling, so what they can do is detect and bring any suspected carrier to receive treatment.

Across the region, containment faces the challenge of air travel. Previously emergencies had been declared for Ebola, Zika and H1N1. Health authorities and facilities everywhere should adhere to the current WHO guidelines for infection prevention and constraint.

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