

Timeline - COVID-19: Events from the first identified case to 15 April

XU YI-CHONG

8 December 2019

First known case.¹

26 December

First family-cluster of 3 cases was reported to Wuhan Municipal Health Commission.²

30 December

Wuhan Municipal Health Commission reports pneumonia with unknown cases to National Health Commission (NHC) and China Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (China- CDC).

31 December

China reports a cluster of cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, Hubei Province.

WHO epidemic intelligence system picks up a report about a cluster of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause in Wuhan, China, from the website of the Wuhan Health Authority and through WHO country office with the Government authorities in China.³

1 January 2020

WHO sets up the IMST (Incident Management Support Team) across the three levels of the organisation: headquarters, regional headquarters and country level, putting the organization on an emergency footing for dealing with the outbreak.

2 January

WHO informs the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN), that includes more than 260 institutions in more than 70 countries.

3 January

China informs WHO under International Health Regulation (IHR) 2005 and also informs CDC in US, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore, which in turn alert all hospitals in the US, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan.

5 January

China-CDC excludes SARS, MERS and Avian Influenza as the cause for the new coronavirus.

WHO publishes its first Disease Outbreak News on the new virus and gives its first warning to the international community

10 January

WHO issues a comprehensive package of technical guidance and travel advice to all countries and procedures on how to detect, test and manage potential cases, based on what was known about the virus at the time.

WHO advises against the application of any travel or trade restrictions on China based on the information currently available on this event; yet advises self-reporting and precautionary measures should be adopted.

WHO convenes its strategic and technical advisory group on infectious hazards

11 January

China publicly shares genetic sequence of COVID-19.

13 January

First 2019-Cov-19 test kit developed.

Officials confirm a case of Covid-19 in Thailand, the first recorded case outside of China.

13-14 January

A team of experts from Beijing, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Hubei visits Wuhan.

14 January

WHO's technical lead for COVID-19, Dr Maria Van Kerkhove tells a press briefing that there may have been limited human-to-human transmission of the coronavirus (in the 41 confirmed cases), mainly through family members, and that there was a risk of a possible wider outbreak. She also says that human-to-human transmission would not be surprising given their experience with SARS, MERS and other respiratory pathogens.

16-17 January

Another team of experts from Beijing, Hong Kong and Singapore visits Wuhan.

20-21 January

WHO experts from its China and Western Pacific regional offices conduct a brief field visit to Wuhan.

22 January

WHO mission to China issues a statement that there is evidence of human-to-human transmission in Wuhan but more investigation was needed to understand the full extent of transmission.

First case in the United States with Trump responding to CNBC: 'we have it totally under control ... it's going to be just fine'.

22-23 January

The WHO Director General convenes an Emergency Committee (EC) under IHR 2005 to assess whether the outbreak constitutes a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC). The 15 independent members from around the world could not reach a consensus based on the evidence available at the time. They asked to be reconvened within 10 days after receiving more information.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus says in a statement that it is too early to declare the coronavirus outbreak a PHEIC, yet, 'Make no mistake. This is an emergency in China, but it has not yet become a global health emergency. It may yet become one'.

23 January

10:00am Lockdown in Wuhan

24 January

Lockdown of another 15 cities in Hubei

28 January 2020

A senior WHO delegation led by the DG, with Mike Ryan as Director of Emergencies, travel to Beijing to meet China's leaders, learn more about China's response, and offer technical assistance.

While in Beijing, DG agrees with Chinese government leaders that an international team of leading scientists would travel to China on a mission to better understand the context, the overall response, and exchange information and experience.

29 January

Dr. Mike Ryan, head of the WHO's Health Emergencies Programme, says, 'The whole world needs to be on alert now. The whole world needs to take action and be ready for any cases that come from the epicentre or other epicentres that become established'.

President Trump announces the formation of the President's Task Force on the Novel Coronavirus,

which is chaired by the Secretary for Health and Human Services and coordinated through the National Security Council.⁴

30 January

The WHO Director-General reconvenes another Emergency Committee, that reaches consensus and advises the DG that the outbreak constitutes a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). The DG accepts the recommendation and declares the novel coronavirus outbreak (2019-nCoV) a PHEIC. This is the 6th time WHO has declared a PHEIC since the IHR 2005 came into force in 2007.

WHO's situation report of 30 January reports 7818 total confirmed cases worldwide, with only 82 cases reported in 18 countries outside China.

WHO gives a risk assessment of 'very high' for China, and 'high' at the global level.

3 February

WHO releases its Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan to the international community to help protect states with weaker health systems.

4 February

President Trump says 'We are coordinating with the Chinese government and working closely together on the coronavirus outbreak in China. My administration will take all necessary steps to safeguard our citizens from this threat'.

5 February

US House Committee on Foreign Affairs, hearing on 'The Wuhan Coronavirus: Assessing the Outbreak, the Response, and Regional Implications'.

10 February

At a campaign rally in Manchester, N.H., Trump says: 'Looks like by April, you know, in theory, when it gets a little warmer, it miraculously goes away. I hope that's true. But we're doing great in our country. China, I spoke with President Xi, and they're working very, very hard. And I think it's going to all work out fine'.

11-12 February

WHO convenes a Research and Innovation Forum on COVID-19, attended by more than 400 experts and funders from around the world.

At a WHO briefing, DG urges world leaders to give priority to containing the virus: 'To be honest, a virus is more powerful in creating political, economic and social upheaval than any terrorist attack. A virus can have

more powerful consequences than any terrorist action, and that's true. If the world doesn't want to wake up and consider this enemy virus as Public Enemy Number 1, I don't think we will learn our lessons'.

16-24 February

The WHO-China Joint mission, which includes experts from Canada, Germany, Japan, Nigeria, Republic of Korea, Russia, Singapore and the US (CDC, NIH) spends time in Beijing and also travels to Wuhan and two other cities. They speak with health officials, scientists and health workers. The report of the joint mission can be found here: <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/who-china-joint-mission-on-covid-19-final-report.pdf>

24 February

In a tweet, Trump writes, 'The Coronavirus is very much under control in the USA. We are in contact with everyone and all relevant countries. CDC & World Health have been working hard and very smart. Stock Market starting to look very good to me!'

25 February

Bruce Aylward, team leader for the WHO-China joint mission, addresses a press conference: 'Folks, this is rapidly epidemic in different places that we've got to tackle super-fast to prevent a pandemic'.

27 February

The Director of US CDC tells House Committee that, with the majority of cases still centred in Hubei Province, the immediate risk to most Americans is low.

28 February

The WHO raises the global risk of the coronavirus from 'high' to 'very high'.

10 March

In a meeting with Republican senators at the US Capitol, Trump says, 'This was unexpected ... And it hit the world. And we're prepared, and we're doing a great job with it. And it will go away. Just stay calm. It will go away'.

11 March

Deeply concerned both by the alarming levels of spread and severity, and by the alarming levels of inaction, WHO makes the assessment that COVID-19 can be characterised as a pandemic.

Trump says in an Oval Office address: '[For] The vast majority of Americans, the risk is very, very low'.

13 March

Covid-19 Solidarity Response Fund is launched to receive donations from private individuals, corporations and institutions.

16 March

WHO DG: 'You cannot fight a fire blindfolded. And we cannot stop this pandemic if we don't know who is infected'. 'We have a simple message for all countries: test, test, test. Test every suspected case'.

At a press briefing, Trump issues orders to control the spread of the virus in the US: 'My administration is recommending that all Americans, including the young and healthy, work to engage in schooling from home when possible. Avoid gathering in groups of more than 10 people. Avoid discretionary travel. And avoid eating and drinking at bars, restaurants and public food courts. If everyone makes this change or these critical changes and sacrifices now, we will rally together as one nation and we will defeat the virus. And we're going to have a big celebration all together. With several weeks of focused action, we can turn the corner and turn it quickly'.

17 March

Trump told reporters: 'This is a pandemic ... I felt it was a pandemic long before it was called a pandemic'.

18 March

WHO and partners launch the Solidarity Trial, an international clinical trial that aims to generate robust data from around the world to find the most effective treatments for COVID-19.

21 March

Trump tweets about potential coronavirus treatments: 'HYDROXYCHLOROQUINE & AZITHROMYCIN, taken together, have a real chance to be one of the biggest game changers in the history of medicine. The FDA has moved mountains - Thank You! Hopefully they will BOTH (H works better with A, International Journal of Antimicrobial Agents)...'

23 March

In a WHO briefing, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus says, 'Using untested medicines without the right evidence could raise false hope and even do more harm than good'.

He also says that the 'pandemic is accelerating ... It took 67 days from the first reported case to reach the first 100,000 cases, 11 days for the second 100,000 cases and just four days for the third 100,000 cases'.

24 March

Trump says: 'Easter is a very special day for me. And I see it sort of in that timeline that I'm thinking about. And I say, wouldn't it be great to have all of the churches full?'

26 March

'We are at war with a virus that threatens to tear us apart.'

says WHO DG to world leaders in a special virtual summit on the COVID-19 pandemic.

6 April

Dr. Mike Ryan, head of the WHO's Health Emergencies Programme, says you can't lift a lockdown all at once. 'You need to say, "We will stop doing this element of the shutdown, and then we will wait, and we will look at the data. If that works, we go to the next stage and the next stage." So, a careful, calibrated stepwise exit from lockdown'.

7 April

Trump criticises the WHO for mishandling the pandemic. 'The WHO really blew it. For some reason, funded largely by the United States, yet very China-centric. We will be giving that a good look. Fortunately, I rejected their advice on keeping our borders open to China early on. Why did they give us such a faulty recommendation?'

8 April

'Please don't politicize this virus', WHO DG says in a briefing in Geneva after he was asked about Trump's remarks the day before. He later urged political leaders to 'please quarantine politicizing COVID'.

14 April

'Today I am instructing my administration to halt funding of the World Health Organization while a review is conducted to assess the World Health Organization's role in severely mismanaging and covering up the spread of the coronavirus', Trump says in a briefing at the White House.

15 April

'We regret the decision of the president of the United States to order a halt in funding to the World Health Organization,' says WHO DG at a news conference.

Responding to the US accusations, Ryan of the WHO says, 'In the first weeks of January, the WHO was very, very clear'.

'We alerted the world on January the 5th,' Ryan says. 'Systems around the world, including the U.S., began to activate their incident management systems on January the 6th. And through the next number of weeks, we've produced multiple updates to countries, including briefing multiple governments, multiple scientists around the world, on the developing situation – and that is what it was, a developing situation'.

In an interview with NPR that will air on April 16, the US ambassador to the United Nations, Kelly Craft, states: '[The World Health Organization] was not accurate. Had it been accurate, it would have slowed the virus and saved thousands of lives.'

18-19 May

Virtual World Health Assembly

19 May 2020

World Health Assembly Resolution (A73.1): COVID-19 Response: Co-sponsored by more than 130 countries

2. ACKNOWLEDGES the key leadership role of WHO and the fundamental role of the United Nations system in catalysing and coordinating the comprehensive global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the central efforts of Member States therein;

7. CALLS ON Member States, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic:

(10) to provide WHO with timely, accurate and sufficiently detailed public health information related to the COVID-19 pandemic, as required by the International Health Regulations (2005);

9. REQUESTS the Director-General:

(10) to initiate, at the earliest appropriate moment, and in consultation with Member States, a stepwise process of impartial, independent and comprehensive evaluation, including using existing mechanisms, as appropriate, to review experience gained and lessons learned from the WHO-coordinated international health response to COVID-19 – including (i) the effectiveness of the mechanisms at WHO's disposal; (ii) the functioning of the International Health Regulations (2005) and the status of implementation of the relevant recommendations of previous IHR Review Committees; (iii) WHO's contribution to United Nations-wide efforts; and (iv) the actions of WHO and their timelines pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic – and to make recommendations to improve capacity for global pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response, including through strengthening, as appropriate, the WHO Health Emergencies Programme.

End Notes

1. Wu, Z. and McGoogan, J., 2020 'Characteristics of and Important Lessons from the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Outbreak in China,' *JAMA (Journal of American medical Association)*, 323, 13:1239-1242. doi:10.1001/jama.2020.2648.
2. All information on China is from China-CDC daily briefing, starting on 3 January 2020, at http://www.chinacdc.cn/jkzt/crb/zl/szkb_11803/jszl_11809/index_12.html.
3. All the information from the WHO is from the Timeline of Covid-19 provided by the WHO <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/27-04-2020-who-timeline---covid-19>.
4. All quotes of President Trump are from Tamara Keith, 'Timeline: What Trump Has Said And Done About The Coronavirus,' NPR, 21 April 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/04/21/837348551/timeline-what-trump-has-said-and-done-about-the-coronavirus>