UNOG Bi-weekly press briefing: Coronavirus Update WHO

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Shotlist

1. Exterior, Palais des Nations
2. Wide shot, press briefing room
3. Close up, hands typing
4. SOUNDBITE (English) – Christian Lindmeier, Spokesperson of the World Health Organisation (WHO): “This is a scenario which is expected, because travellers have been going, are still going, and that’s completely okay, or cases have been dormant because people have been infected, they were asymptomatic or with mild symptoms. So, we will have to see, we are expecting to see more cases and more countries to come”.
5. Medium shot, camera people
6. SOUNDBITE (English) – Christian Lindmeier, Spokesperson of the World Health Organisation (WHO): “We have increased cases, but on the other hand it is also very typical scenario that the closer you look and the more you understand the virus, the more we are now also looking for asymptomatic possible transmission or for people with mild syndromes and infections through mild symptoms. So, the closer you are looking into this, the more deaths you may categorize then as related to this Coronavirus. So this is unfortunately, but a typical scenario to expect to be seen for a few more days certainly”.
7. Medium shot, podium
8. SOUNDBITE (English) – Christian Lindmeier, Spokesperson of the World Health Organisation (WHO): “We are more worried about countries with weaker health systems without putting this on to a continent alone. And again, this is exactly the scenario which is worrisome that in such a country the virus spreads uncontrolled for a while and unmonitored for a while and then of
course the whole outbreak spreads larger. So again, this was one of the key reasons for declaring the Public Health Emergency of International Concern”.

9. Close up, journalist

10. **SOUNDBITE (English)** – Christian Lindmeier, Spokesperson of the World Health Organisation (WHO): “If a health system is weak, there are all types of possibilities to help them. On the one hand, it could be technical assistance in terms of training of health care staff. That is one important part. It could be as simple and basic as logistical supplies in sending masks or other equipment which might be necessary. Of course, it would include the famous RDT, rapid diagnostic test, or other medical equipment”.

11. Medium shot, journalist

12. **SOUNDBITE (English)** – Christian Lindmeier, Spokesperson of the World Health Organisation (WHO): “Travel and trade restrictions are not recommended by the WHO, it might be a logical step to first look into this and say ‘Look we see a danger from outside so let’s lock ourselves up’. But as we know from other scenarios, be it Ebola or other cases, whenever people want to travel, they will. And if the official paths are not open, they will find unofficial paths. But the only way to control, to check, to identify travel history, to try to monitor who is coming across to your border and to see whether they have any signs of infections is through official border crossing points”.

13. Medium shot, journalists

14. Medium shot, podium

15. Medium shot, journalists
Amid the significant increase in numbers of infections of the novel coronavirus and additional countries reporting confirmed cases globally, the Emergency Committee of the World Health Organization has declared last night a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). The rapid spread of the respiratory virus is covering now all China. Its National Health Commission (NHC) said that the death toll from the coronavirus outbreak in the country rose to 213. The total number of confirmed cases in China reached 9,692 as of today.

Speaking to the media today at the United Nations in Geneva, WHO’s spokesperson Christian Lindmeier, said that “this is a scenario which is expected, because travellers have been going, are still going, and that’s completely okay, or cases have been dormant because people have been infected, they were asymptomatic or with mild symptoms. So, we will have to see, we are expecting to see more cases and more countries to come”.

WHO’s Emergency Committee believes that it is still possible to interrupt virus spread, provided that countries put in place strong measures to detect disease early, silage and treat cases, trace contact.

WHO’s Christian Lindmeier said that “we have increased cases, but on the other hand it is also very typical scenario that the closer you look and the more you understand the virus, the more we are now also looking for asymptomatic possible transmission or for people with mild syndromes and infections through mild symptoms”. Lindmeier added that “the closer you are looking into this, the more deaths you may categorize then as related to this Coronavirus. So this is unfortunately, but a typical scenario to expect to be seen for a few more days certainly”.

At this stage, WHO said that there are still many unknowns about the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) such as how this virus is developed in the different stages a patient goes through, at what stage a person falls sick. Also unclear, if the 171 patients who were cured and discharged from the virus were still at risk of being infected again. It is “a big call to vamp up science and research”.

WHO’s greatest concern is the potential for the virus to spread to countries with weaker health systems, and which are ill-prepared to deal with it.

WHO’s spokesperson said that “we are more worried about countries with weaker health systems without putting this on to a continent alone”. Lindmeier emphasized that “this is exactly the scenario which is worrisome that in such a country the virus spreads uncontrolled for a while and unmonitored for a while and then of course the whole outbreak spreads larger. So again, this was one of the key reasons for declaring the Public Health Emergency of International Concern”.

WHO’s country offices are present in over 150 countries. Being in permanent contact with the respective ministries of health they can assist to register cases and also to seek proactively assistance from WHO should gaps are identified in the response system.

“If a health system is weak, there are all types of possibilities to help them”, WHO’s Lindmeier explained. “On the one hand, it could be technical assistance in terms of training of health care staff. That is one important part. It could be as simple and basic as logistical supplies in sending masks or other equipment which might be necessary. Of course, it would include the famous RDT, rapid diagnostic test, or other medical equipment”.

Nearly 60 million people have been under partial or full lockdown in Chinese cities for a week. Several countries are sending planes to evacuate foreign citizens under lockdown in the Chinese city Wuhan, capital of the central Hubei province, where the outbreak first appeared. Some airlines have stopped flying to mainland China.

WHO has not recommended curbs on travel or trade with Beijing, because keeping borders open prevent
illegal border crossings.

Lindmeier explained that “travel and trade restrictions are not recommended by the WHO, it might be a logical step to first look into this and say ‘Look, we see a danger from outside, so let’s lock ourselves up’. But as we know from other scenarios, be it Ebola or other cases, whenever people want to travel, they will. And if the official paths are not open, they will find unofficial paths. But the only way to control, to check, to identify travel history, to try to monitor who is coming across to your border and to see whether they have any signs of infections is through official border crossing points”.

This is the fifth time that the World Health Organisation has declared a PHEIC in a decade.