



Statement – Novel coronavirus outbreak: Preparing now as one

25 January 2020 | Statement | Reading time: 2 min (449 words)

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25 January 2020, Copenhagen, Denmark

The novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) outbreak in China is a sign that every country needs to be ready to timely detect and manage outbreaks of any type. At the WHO Regional Office for Europe we have been investing all our expertise and passion in supporting European countries in this endeavour. This is at the core of our mandate.

The first cases of 2019-nCoV confirmed in Europe were not unexpected, and they remind us that the global nature of travels exempts no country from infectious disease spread. This also means that no country can afford postponing the establishment of all necessary measures to protect their people. This is at the core of their mandate.

We commend France on its ability to rapidly identify 2019-nCoV suspect cases and diagnose them. The fact that the health care workers attending the patients were alerted to recognize symptoms and investigate travel history was instrumental to act quickly and effectively. This is a sign of the engagement of health professionals in outbreak preparedness and response that is at the cornerstone of effective control.

Timely action is fundamental for early containment and France's fast notification to WHO and rapid public communication is an example of that. It is also an example of global collaboration and solidarity.

At a time of uncertainty about the way a virus originates and behaves, it is even more critical that countries, organizations and the international community act as one. We need to move as one region, as one world in scaling up our ability to prepare and respond together.

This includes being ready at the local and national levels to detect sick people, test samples of those suspected of 2019-nCoV infection, manage patients adequately, maximize infection control, and maintain open communication with the public.

This also includes reaching out to the right sectors and partners, engaging health professionals and communities, supporting countries in need, and sharing information in a transparent manner to facilitate knowledge and action.

The time is now to make ourselves ready. WHO is doing everything it can to investigate this outbreak together with Chinese authorities, global experts and partners to understand it fully and contain it as early as possible. The Regional Office is working round the clock to equip European countries with guidance and support.

However, we do not know at this point how the outbreak will evolve. While we cannot predict the virus' behavior, we can decide how good we are in stopping it. Today we are offered a window of opportunity; today we must grab it to make the region and the world safer. This is what all our people expect.