SITUATION OVERVIEW

On 10 March, President Xi Jinping made a surprise visit to Wuhan, where COVID-19 is believed to have originated. While few details of the trip have been released, the visit marks a turning point in China’s struggle against the epidemic and a clear signal that the government believes it has succeeded in stopping its spread. New daily infections in Hubei Province have been in double digits the past few days, while infections outside Hubei have slowed to a trickle: at the end of Monday, 9 March, no new locally transmitted cases had been reported outside Hubei for three consecutive days. Chinese border controls are tightening.

China can be expected to deepen ongoing efforts to restart the economy, while slowly easing restrictions on movement. A key challenge in this period will be staying abreast of changing regulations, regulatory confusion and widely varying degrees of enforcement. Last week, the cities of Beijing and Shanghai announced that arrivals from four countries (South Korea, Italy, Iran and Japan) are required to observe a 14-day home quarantine, however anecdotally there have been reports of local authorities requiring the quarantine of arrivals from any foreign country. Travel within China, particularly for foreigners, remains very difficult for similar reasons (anyone arriving in Beijing from other areas of China is also quarantined). Such conditions will likely persist until the spread of the disease has been curtailed globally. Separately, Hong Kong announced that arrivals from all of Italy, along with certain regions of France and Germany will be required to undergo
14 days' quarantine; this is in addition to early quarantine rules for arrivals from Mainland China, South Korea and Iran. Hill & Associates recommends that all proposed travel to, from and within China be subject to a review of anti-epidemic measures at the local level to avoid unforeseen difficulties.

Travel Advisory
The US State Department advisory remains at Level 4 for all of China, Do Not Travel. On 11 February, the State Department said that it allowed non-essential personnel to leave the Consulate in Hong Kong. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC) have issued a Level 3 advisory: “Warning”, avoid all non-essential travel to China. The US CDC issued a “Level 1” travel advisory for Hong Kong, due to the rising number of infections in the city. The advisory recommends practicing usual precautions, including frequent hand washing and avoiding the sick. While mild, the advisory was the first step on a ladder of warnings, and clients should expect escalations. Travel restrictions and mandated 14-day quarantine for those arriving in China from abroad and or traveling within China are inconsistently announced and enforced, and following a trend of escalation. Hill & Associates recommends that all proposed travel to, from and within China be subject to a review of anti-epidemic measures at the local level to avoid unforeseen difficulties.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said on Monday, 9 March, that the COVID-19 is “very close” to becoming a pandemic. A “public health emergency of international concern” (PHEIC) remains in effect.

The WHO risk assessment in Situation Report 49 published 9 March:

China: Very High; Regionally: Very High; Globally: Very High

Current Key Concerns
- A second wave of infections remains possible as work and life slowly begin to normalize in most cities in China. Such a turn of events would likely prompt even stricter anti-epidemic measures.
- Escalating outbreaks in other countries are further complicating travel to and within China, as the Chinese government responds with additional travel measures at several levels of government.

Chinese Government Measures
The state of epidemic response and recovery may vary greatly from place to place, even within a single municipality. For example although Shanghai on the whole has significantly relaxed restrictions, allowing for the resumption of business, Hill & Associates is anecdotally aware that some housing compounds have escalated the monitoring of residents’ movements. Clients are advised to research their own areas of operations and residence to ascertain the most accurate and up-to-date information.

- The government has encouraged companies to take anti-epidemic measures as people return to work. This may include basic temperature checks, inquiries into travel history and flexible working arrangements.
- The government has taken new steps to monitor interprovincial travel, including inspecting geolocation data from mobile devices to determine the travel history of individuals; China’s mobile carriers have facilitated this by introducing a new texting service that sends geolocation history to users upon request.
- Technology-based monitoring systems, including QR-based systems, are being increasingly used to monitor and control the movement of people, although these have not been nationally mandated.

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1 https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/China.html
- **Travel & Transportation Restrictions:**
  - Hubei Province maintains tight restrictions on the movement of people, although a government official said on 6 March that measures might soon be eased.
  - There are travel and public transit restrictions of various degrees throughout China. If traveling, clients are advised to research their route and destination to ascertain up-to-date information.
  - China’s National Railway Group announced on 15 February that in addition to no longer selling standing-room only tickets, it began limiting sales for seats. This will reduce train capacity by 50%.
  - On 21 February, Beijing relaxed rules on an earlier-announced mandatory 14-day quarantine period for all visitors to the city. Exemptions include, 1.) Overseas arrivals who have not traveled in China for the previous 14 days, and who enter the country at Beijing Capital Airport or Daxing Airport, 2.) Short-term tourists and business travelers arriving from parts of China outside Hubei, provided they comply with the health measures put in place by their hotels or employers, 3.) Those returning to jobs in Beijing, provided their employer has implemented “closed-management” systems and health checks.
  - The cities of Beijing and Shanghai announced that arrivals from four countries (South Korea, Italy, Iran and Japan) are required to observe a 14-day home quarantine, however anecdotaly there have been reports of local authorities requiring the quarantine of arrivals from any foreign country.

- **Work/School/Event Cancellations:**
  - Work in factories and offices is slowly resuming.
  - Schools are expected to remain closed until at least May.
  - Companies must meet certain inspection and registration requirements before resuming operations. A circular released by the State Council guiding local governments is available [here (in Chinese)](http://example.com). Companies should check with local regulators for specific requirements.

- **Medical Services:**
  - Medical services outside severely impacted areas are currently operating normally, with limited signs of strained capacity.

- **Social and Political Issues:**
  - A wave of intense public anger over the crisis, in particular the revelation that the Wuhan government suppressed some early information, appears to have subsided to a degree. The risk of significant social unrest is low. It is unclear what the long-term political consequences of the epidemic may be.
  - Media controls have been tightened significantly.
  - **There is a risk of social instability in Hong Kong.** However, public anger over the government’s perceived slow response, and local concerns over quarantine sites and clinics has subsided. Clients should remain prepared nonetheless for the possibility of a resumption of violence.

**Political Advisory**

In addition to being a health emergency, the virus outbreak is also a sensitive political matter for the Chinese state. Reports of anti-Chinese xenophobia in foreign countries as well as diplomatic tensions could increase the level of sensitivity. As COVID-19 has declined in China and risen in other countries, the notion that the virus was Chinese in origin has become increasingly politicized. Clients are advised to remain up to date with national and local regulations related to the crisis, and to note that measures adopted by provincial and local governments in China are not uniform.
Global and Selected Foreign Country/Special Territory Measures

Airports across the world have introduced enhanced screening measures to prevent the further international spread of the disease. According to a report by the WHO, at least 72 states parties have implemented travel restrictions on foreign nationals who have been in China. Although specific regulations may vary, foreign nationals are typically barred entry if they have been in China within the past 14 days upon arrival at customs. At least 43 airlines around the world have suspended flights to China. The WHO is working on recommendations for resuming flights. A list of airlines that have restricted China service is available here.

Travel has been limited between the Mainland and other Chinese territories:

- **Hong Kong**
  - Temporary ban on travellers arriving from Wuhan and Hubei.
  - **Mandatory quarantine for anyone arriving from Mainland China, Italy, South Korea and Iran, along with certain regions of France and Germany, for 14 days.**
  - Cross-border travel has been curtailed. As of 3 February all but the following four ports of entry have been temporarily closed: Shenzhen Bay Port, Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge, Hong Kong International Airport and Kai Tak Cruise Terminal. Flights to the mainland are greatly reduced. Beijing additionally said it would suspend the issuance of new individual travel permits to Hong Kong.³

- **Macau**
  - Temporary ban on travelers arriving from Wuhan and Hubei.
  - **Mandatory 14-day quarantine for those who have been to South Korea, Italy, Iran Germany, France, Spain or Japan within 14 days prior to their entry.**

- **Taiwan**
  - Mainland Chinese barred from entering Taiwan.
  - All arrivals that have traveled to Hong Kong, Macau and **South Korea** will be quarantined for 14 days.

**Evacuations:** Many nations have confirmed at least limited evacuations of their citizens living in Wuhan. The US State Department advises that those currently in China should consider departing using commercial means, and it has ordered the departure of all family members of U.S. personnel in China under the age 21. A list compiled by Reuters of evacuations by country is available here.

**Security Response Benchmarking**

Multinational firms have begun adopting various policies in response to the outbreak, including the following:

- Restricting all non-essential travel to China
- Allowing flexible working arrangements including working from home, cancelling outbound travel for Chinese employees who wish to remain with their families
- For employees returning from China, mandatory working from home for a set period, for example 14 days, to mitigate the risk of passing infection to offices abroad.
- Mandating that employees presenting flu-like symptoms obtain a diagnosis before returning to work
- A large number of major multinational corporations have closed their offices and stores or suspended operations in Mainland China, Hong Kong or both.

Virus Factsheet

Key aspects of the Wuhan coronavirus, or “COVID-19,” are still relatively poorly understood. The following information is derived from WHO Situation Reports\(^4\) and other sources.

- **Incubation Period:**
  - 1-14 days, but generally 3-7 days. Recent research by a Chinese team found that the incubation period could be as long as 24 days. The Hubei government has said the incubation period could be as long as 27 days, based on data from one case. According to the WHO, the median incubation period has been further refined to 5-6 days.

- **Severity:**
  - Most people expected to present relatively mild symptoms
  - Current estimates suggest that about 15% progress to severe disease with 3% becoming critical, including pneumonia and respiratory failure
  - The mortality rate for confirmed infections is about 2%, with some experts expecting this number to fall as milder cases are found. However, these preliminary estimations should be treated with caution. The mortality rate of seasonal flu is below 0.1%, with the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic at around 2.5%.

- **Transmissibility:**
  - The virus is human transmissible. Recent research by Chinese scientists supports asymptomatic spread and concludes that the virus behaves similarly to the flu, suggesting that it may spread more easily than previously thought. Chinese researchers have documented the case of a woman who spread the virus to five family members without showing symptoms herself.
  - In Chengdu, a recovered patient was readmitted to hospital after once again testing positive for the virus (an earlier test may have been a false negative). On 22 February, Wuhan subsequently mandated 14 days’ quarantine for all patients cured of the virus.
  - The reproduction number of the virus, expressed as “R\(_0\)” (R-naught), which indicates how many additional infections will result from each infection, remains uncertain. The WHO published an estimated R\(_0\) of 1.4 to 2.5, although some teams have placed this number higher. (In a disease with a R\(_0\) of 1 each infection would be expected to cause one additional infection).
  - **Routes of transmission are believed to include:**
    - Respiratory droplets
    - Close physical contact
    - Contact with contaminated surfaces, where the virus may survive for some time
    - Limited evidence for transmission via the fecal-oral route
    - There has been some misinformation that the virus may be able to spread long distances through the air. This is false.

- **Prevention: If traveling to China, Clients are advised to:**
  - Avoid contact with sick people.
  - Avoid animals (alive or dead), animal markets, and products that come from animals (such as uncooked meat).
  - Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if

\(^4\)https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports
soap and water are not available.

Those who have become ill during a 14-day period following travel to China should:

- Seek medical care right away. Before you go to a doctor’s office or emergency room, call ahead and tell them about your recent travel and your symptoms.
- Avoid contact with others
- Do not travel while sick
- Cover your mouth and nose while sneezing with a sleeve or tissue, not with the hands
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

- Treatment:
  - The only proven available treatment for the disease is standard supportive care.
  - There is anecdotal evidence that anti-viral and AIDS drugs may be useful in treating patients, however these treatments have not yet been validated.

- Scrutiny of Infection Numbers and Data:
  - Reported infection figures in China are generally believed to be credible, although some experts have noted that because patients with milder symptoms may go undiagnosed, total infections may be higher. A number of cities in China have banned the sale of over-the-counter flu medicines in attempts to force people to check themselves into hospital, suggesting concern over the possibility of underreported infections, although such policies may be an overreaction.
  - Chinese domestic and international media has extensively reported on what is believed to be an effort by the Wuhan local government limit reporting of the epidemic in its early stages. However, there is no credible evidence that the Chinese government is currently manipulating infections figures.
  - Media sources have reported some frustration in the global scientific community over the lack of detailed epidemiological data.

### Infections/Deaths by Territory

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<th>Province or Territory</th>
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Wuhan Coronavirus Outbreak Infection Numbers – 1730hrs 10 March, China Local Time
Total Confirmed Infections: 80,928   Current Infections: 17,599
Deaths: 3,140     Recovered: 60,189
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**Selected Nations Current Infected**

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