



Ref.: C.L.4.2020

... The World Health Organization presents its compliments to Member States and has the honour to attach information on the current outbreak of COVID-19.

This Circular Letter and the attached information is being dispatched through electronic mail to the official email addresses provided by Member States in response to circular letters C.L.38.2017 and C.L.25.2018 requesting Member States to provide an electronic address or electronic addresses where official correspondence can be sent.

This Circular Letter and the attached information has also been sent to representatives in the Permanent Missions to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations at Geneva.

WHO representatives and liaison officers have also received this Circular Letter and the information and are requested to follow up with Member States as appropriate.

It is envisaged that the Secretariat will continue to share information and requests to Member States through this mechanism for rapid and timely engagement.

The World Health Organization takes this opportunity to renew to Member States the assurance of its highest consideration.

GENEVA, 17 February 2020

... ENCL.: (1)

Additional health measures in relation to the Public Health Emergency of International Concern on the COVID-19 outbreak

The WHO Secretariat would like to thank all Member States for their engagement and solidarity with the People's Republic of China while they are working towards containing the current outbreak of COVID-19.

The Secretariat reminds Member States of the determination of this outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern under the International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR) on 30 January 2020, and of the Temporary Recommendations issued on that occasion.

With reference to C.L.2.2020, WHO Secretariat has continued to monitor health measures related to international traffic in relation to this outbreak. In accordance with Article 43 of the IHR, the Secretariat has shared with all National IHR Focal Points the reports received from States Parties on additional health measures implemented in relation to this event. Annex I presents an assessment of these reports.

The Secretariat would like to remind Member States of the joint obligations under the International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR) on collaboration and on implementing additional health measures. As mentioned in C.L.2.2020, such measures should be commensurate with the public health risk of the event, be informed by scientific evidence, and be reconsidered regularly as the situation evolves.

The WHO Secretariat would like to remind Member States about the WHO Technical Guidance about this event, which is regularly updated on the WHO website,¹ the WHO travel advice which is also updated regularly,² about the daily situation reports, which provide an up-to-date information about the evolution of the outbreak,³ as well as about the outcome of the global research and innovation forum convened by WHO on 11–12 February 2020, to assess the current level of knowledge about the new COVID-19 disease, and identify global research priorities.⁴

The Secretariat would also like to remind that, according to Article 2 of IHR, the purpose and scope of the International Health Regulations (2005) are to prevent, protect against, control and provide a public health response to the international spread of disease in ways that are commensurate with and restricted to public health risks, and, in particular, in ways that avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade.

WHO would like to encourage Member States to continue to communicate with WHO IHR Contact Points across the six WHO regions.

¹ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>.

² <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/travel-advice>.

³ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports/>.

⁴ <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/12-02-2020-world-experts-and-funders-set-priorities-for-covid-19-research>.

Annex I. Official reports on additional health measures in relation to the COVID-19 outbreak

In accordance with Article 43 of the IHR (2005), WHO Secretariat has shared information about additional health measures with other States Parties on 6 February 2020.¹

As of 13 February, 28 States Parties officially reported to the WHO Secretariat on additional health measures that significantly interfere with international traffic and provided the public health rationale for the measures implemented. (8 more since 6 February 2020). The rationale, as reported by Member States, includes:

1. WHO determination of the PHEIC, WHO advice that the outbreak is still in containment phase, and the Temporary Recommendations to all countries to be prepared for containment;
2. New, unknown virus, with limited knowledge about its characteristics, including: the animal source, the duration of persistence of the virus in the environment, the potential for its mutation;
3. Vulnerabilities in receiving countries: limited laboratory capacities, concerns about overburdening the public health response capacities, given the concomitant influenza season in many countries, limited capacities to quarantine returning travellers; specificities of small island States, with reduced public health response capacities in case of importation of cases;
4. Limited knowledge about the epidemiology of the disease, including: ability of transmission from asymptomatic carriers, and the full clinical spectrum of the disease and its severity;
5. The lack of a specific treatment or vaccine;
6. Perceived public anxiety due to large volume of travel for business and tourism from the affected provinces, perceived threats to safety and security.

¹ <https://extranet.who.int/ihr/eventinformation/announcement/38283-additional-health-measures-relation-2019-ncov-outbreak-region-western-pacific>; <https://extranet.who.int/ihr/eventinformation/announcement/38282-additional-health-measures-relation-2019-ncov-outbreak-region-europe-euro-and>; <https://extranet.who.int/ihr/eventinformation/announcement/38281-additional-health-measures-relation-2019-ncov-outbreak-regions-americas-amropaho>.