

HEALTH

# 'Coronavirus threat in check'

New virus can enter through airports, but authorities say they are well prepared to prevent outbreak in SA

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ALTHOUGH the death toll and confirmed cases of the coronavirus have risen in China, the National Department of Health has urged locals not to panic. All provinces were on high alert and had activated response teams.

The outbreak, which has killed at least 41 people and left more than 1000 infected, was detected earlier this month, with possible origins from a market in Wuhan City, in the Hubei province of China.

Patients displayed symptoms of a common cold, which included a runny nose, headache, coughing, a sore throat and a fever.

Since then the US, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, Vietnam and Thailand have had people diagnosed with the virus. As a means to prevent hand-to-mouth transmissions, those in affected countries have taken to wearing clinical masks full time.

On Friday, the eve of the Chinese Lunar New Year, international reports said all flights to and from Wuhan had been cancelled following the Chinese government's decision to place the country under lockdown.

Ntaoleng Lushaba, an English teacher from the Free State currently working at Aston Education School in Tianshui, the second largest city in Gansu province in China, said she was afraid of catching the virus. She said she constantly sanitised her hands and arms and was worried that the virus had not been contained.

Lebitsa flew from the Xi'an international airport in Northwest China to Hong Kong on Tuesday for a four-day holiday. She said locals in Hong Kong wore clinical masks and these were being offered to everybody there.

"People were not frantic but more had masks on," she said. "As I was leaving Hong Kong going to Shenzhen there were scans for determining body temperature and airport officials kept announcing publicly that if one is feeling uneasy there were medics at



PEOPLE burn joss sticks as they pray at the Wong Tai Sin Temple in Hong Kong yesterday to celebrate the Lunar New Year, which marks the Year of the Rat in the Chinese zodiac. | AP

all Mass Transit Railway stops and that people should speak up if they were not feeling well."

Lizeka Maduna, who also works as an English teacher in the same province, is back home for a short holiday. She travelled from Xi'an Xianyang International Airport in China and arrived at OR Tambo International Airport on Wednesday morning and later flew to King Shaka International Airport.

Maduna, from Glenwood in Durban, said since the outbreak of the virus there had been widespread

concern in Tianshui even though it is hours away from the epicentre of the outbreak.

She said the city generally suffered from air pollution and the wearing of clinical masks was the norm, so it was hard to tell whether some people were now wearing masks as a precautionary measure against the virus or the harsh air.

"On arrival at OR Tambo, before luggage collection, Port Health officials were separating locals from international visitors and we passed through scanners," she said. "It was

the first time I saw such machines, and officials held other detectors in their hands."

Popo Maja, spokesperson for the National Department of Health, said there were no reported or confirmed cases and that a report from the World Health Organisation (WHO) indicated that Africa had no cases reported thus far. He said the only way the virus could come here would be through passengers arriving at the OR Tambo or Cape Town international airports, which had direct flights from Singapore.

"We have systems in place and our research institutions and national institutions of communicable diseases are following the guidance of the WHO, which has guidelines on how to diagnose and treat the virus should it come to South Africa," he said.

"Viral infections can be treated in any hospital. They do not require specialist attention and the coronavirus is not highly contagious. Early detection could lead to successful treatment."

Maja explained that trained port health authorities had been stationed at airports in Johannesburg and in Cape Town. The officials were managing walk-in scanners at international arrivals that had the ability to detect the virus.

"Over and above that, the officials have hand-held machines. If you are detected to have a high temperature, you are then taken aside and immediately taken to a clinic for an examination. If there is a need, the person is then taken to the nearest health facility," he said.

Maja stressed that everything was under control and that there was no need for the cancellation of travel plans.

However, travelling to affected cities was not encouraged.

"We have health professionals at seaports even though we do not have many people travelling at sea," he said. "On arrival, port health officials assist crews of those ships. The likelihood of airborne diseases coming to our shores is through the airport."

Airports Company South Africa said it was working closely with the South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) and the Department of Health with regard to the risks posed by the coronavirus at South African airports.

"We are monitoring the situation and are on alert. We will keep passengers updated should screening of travellers and mitigation measures become necessary."

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POVERTY

## China is here to help the poor

THE Chinese community will have much to celebrate as they ring in the New Year.



Fei Mingxing

According to Fei Mingxing, Consul-General of China in Durban, this year the People's Republic of China will achieve its first centenary goal by eradicating poverty in that country – a target set by President Xi Ping.

Mingxing said there were many reasons to celebrate.

"The year 2020 is significant as China will have achieved its first centenary goal of building a prosperous society. China feels South Africa's poverty and we are ready to help. Last year, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the People's Republic of China, Premier Sihle Zikalala said when China wins, South Africa wins. I am responding to that by saying when South Africa wins, China wins."

They were ready to help the poor. Chinese businesspeople had extended their generosity to Durban families affected by the floods in April.

They had also built a R3 million facility that would benefit about 20 000 pupils, and facilitated a Luban workshop in partnership with the Tianjin Vocational Institute of China.

"This year we want to do more projects to help especially those who are at grassroot levels."

"His office hosted two events this week to celebrate the Year of the Rat, in Newcastle and at the Durban City Hall.

Promotion valid from Sunday 26 January to Saturday 1 February 2020

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