

Is China's mysterious virus a 'global health emergency'? 6 things to know about the outbreak

Just three weeks ago, China announced the outbreak of a mysterious new virus in the city of Wuhan involving a few people who had been exposed to animals at a local food market.

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The potential for this SARS-like virus to spread further is so high that the World Health Organization said it would gather an expert panel to meet on Wednesday [January 21] to decide whether the emergence of 2019-nCoV, as the virus is known, constitutes a global public health emergency.

With information about 2019-nCoV — and its risk of spreading — evolving rapidly by the day, we've answered basic questions about the outbreak here. ...

1) How did this outbreak start?

The outbreak was first acknowledged by Chinese officials on December 31 in Wuhan, a city of 11 million in Hubei province. ...

3) How easily does this virus spread?

We don't yet know the exact way the virus is spreading or how easy it is to catch 2019-nCoV. ...
Coronaviruses attack the respiratory system, sometimes targeting the cells deep within the lungs. Only seven, including 2019-nCoV, SARS, and MERS, are known to be spread to humans. ...

6) How worried should I be about a pandemic?

There are too many unknowns to say. We don't know which animal carries this virus, how exactly it spreads, how easily it spreads among people, how deadly it is, or the range of symptoms it can cause.

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