

CHINA

Nine regions launch survey of coronavirus

Checks for asymptomatic people and immunity levels aid anti-virus efforts

By WANG XIAOYU in Beijing and LIU KUN in Wuhan

China has launched a major epidemiological survey of the novel coronavirus in nine provincial-level regions, including hardest-hit Hubei and its provincial capital Wuhan, in order to evaluate the scale of asymptomatic infections and immunity levels across the population, and thus assist in the facilitation of upcoming epidemic-control measures.

On Tuesday in Wuhan, lines began forming at a sports stadium in Jiangxia district, where workers collected blood samples and throat swabs from residents who were randomly selected from local communities to take part in the survey.

Nucleic acid tests using throat swabs will reveal asymptomatic infections, and tests for antibodies in blood samples are expected to help researchers determine if a person has been infected or if an immune response has been generated.

"The goal is to understand the antibody levels in communities and provide scientific evidence for future adjustments in strategies to control the epidemic," Ding Gangqiang, head of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention's National Institute for Nutrition and Health, said on Tuesday. He is also in charge of epidemiological research in Wuhan.

Ding added that the testing program will facilitate the detection of asymptomatic cases — people who are infected but show no symptoms — which is among the chief concerns of epidemic-control authorities guarding against a fresh wave of infections.

"The survey is of great urgency and significance, and its results will enable us to take targeted prevention and control measures after we completely prevail over the disease," he said.

Other regions that are involved in the survey are Beijing, Shanghai

and Chongqing municipalities as well as Liaoning, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Guangdong and Sichuan provinces.

Wuhan will enroll 11,000 of its 11 million residents in the survey. The sample collection procedure, starting on Tuesday, is expected to be completed by Thursday, according to the local government.

Survey participants — the majority of them regular residents, along with a small number of virus control workers such as security guards, taxi drivers and volunteers — come from 100 different communities across the city's 13 districts. The population and the tally of infections in each district are taken into consideration to determine each area's sample size.

A 72-year-old resident surnamed Yu said his entire family of six was selected for the survey.

"I was informed of the testing on Sunday, and the whole process on Tuesday took about 15 minutes," he said. "Because some asymptomatic cases have emerged recently, I believe that such tests are beneficial for myself, my family and the entire society."

Ding, from the China CDC, added that an education campaign is also being rolled out in tandem with the sample collection to help spread awareness about disease prevention and control knowledge.

Although China has basically blocked the local transmission of the virus, medical experts have warned that much remains unknown about the novel coronavirus and that the task of fending off a new surge of cases remains daunting.

On Monday, the leading group of the Communist Party of China Central Committee on coping with the epidemic also stressed during a meeting that swiftly expanding testing will not only reassure the public but also help bolster the resumption of work nationwide.

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Tearful reunion



Nurse Xu Yuefei wipes her daughter's tears during their reunion in Yantai, Shandong province, on Tuesday. Xu had just completed her 14-day quarantine after working on the front lines of the battle against the novel coronavirus outbreak in Hubei province. All 46 medical workers dispatched from the city to Hubei have returned safely. TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Prevention tightened at tourist sites

By CHENG SI

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The central government will tighten up management of domestic tourist attractions to ensure orderly control and prevention work for COVID-19, according to a notice released on Monday.

During the recent Tomb Sweeping Day holiday, some attractions experienced a surge in the number of travelers whose desire for trips intensified after being quarantined for two months, increasing pressure on local governments to boost control and prevention work.

Huangshan Mountain in Anhui province, for example, was crowded with visitors during the holiday, compelling its management committee to post notices on social media reminding travelers of the situation.

The attraction was later closed temporarily as the number of travelers reached its daily limit of 20,000. Nearby attractions such as the ancient villages Xidi and Hongcun also almost reached capacity.

The notice, issued by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and National Health Commission, stressed that attractions are allowed to receive 30 percent of their maximum visitor capacity. Paid scenic spots are required to evaluate the results before launching preferential policies for tickets and entertainment programs.

In addition, indoor venues will be temporarily closed amid the outbreak.

According to the notice, attractions should strengthen management over the flow of visitors. Reservations are required and travelers are encouraged to visit scenic spots at different times to reduce risks of infection.

The notice said that all levels of culture and tourism departments and attractions should also better control traffic to limit the number of travelers.

Attractions can organize staff to check body temperatures and help



Visitors enjoy the scenery on West Lake in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on Monday. LIAN GUOQING / FOR CHINA DAILY

"I think things will be better after the government takes stricter measures to control the numbers of visitors at attractions. It will be much safer with fewer people gathering."

Lin Qiu, Shanghai resident

register travelers' information at entrances, exits and areas where people may gather.

Promotion is also important to help visitors behave in a civilized manner and to enhance their awareness of prevention efforts.

The tourism industry, which was hard-hit by COVID-19, has been gradually recovering thanks to government support and special offers by travel agencies.

For example, domestic attractions received about 43 million vis-

its during the three-day Tomb Sweeping Day holiday, though that was 61.4 percent lower than the same period last year.

"I'm very much looking forward to a trip after staying at home for over two months," said Lin Qiu, a 28-year-old from Shanghai. "I can understand those people who flocked to attractions during the holiday. It's a good signal for the tourism industry."

She said that she would postpone her trip as health is more important.

"I think things will be better after the government takes stricter measures to control the numbers of visitors at attractions. It will be much safer with fewer people gathering."

Zhan Dongmei, a researcher from the China Tourism Academy, said in an interview with Xinhua News Agency that the fight against COVID-19 is not yet finished, and the nation still faces risks of imported cases.

Attractions and tourism-related companies should make travelers' health and safety the top priority when they resume operations, Zhan said.

Imported cases are increasing in Suifenhe

By ZHOU HUIYING and TIAN XUEFEI in Harbin

Heilongjiang's border city Suifenhe has confirmed more COVID-19 infections among a group of people who arrived before the border was closed and are currently quarantined.

The province's health commission reported that the 79 new cases reported on Tuesday were all Chinese people who entered the mainland via the highway port of entry in Suifenhe after flying from Moscow to Vladivostok in Russia. They had arrived before the border port was closed. The authority confirmed no new local infection cases in Suifenhe.

With the help of national and provincial medical support, the city vowed to contain the COVID-19 cases, said Wang Yongping, the city's acting mayor.

As of Tuesday, the province has reported 326 confirmed imported cases, 322 of whom entered Heilongjiang via Suifenhe, a county-level city under Mudanjiang.

The closure of all border crossings with Russia to travelers, especially the highway port of entry in Suifenhe, has been enforced since April 7.

"No local cases related to the imported patients were reported in the city," said Yu Kaijiang, director of the First Affiliated Hospital of Harbin Medical University and head of the provincial medical team dispatched to Suifenhe.

"However, due to the limited medical resources in both Suifenhe and Mudanjiang, Mudanjiang will face great pressure if there are more than 1,000 patients," Yu added.

Amid mounting pressure, the local government has taken strict pandemic-control measures by placing all returnees under concentrated quarantine and conducting coronavirus tests.

"Since March 21, there have been 2,497 people who entered China via Suifenhe, and 1,479 people are still under quarantine," Wang Yongping, Suifenhe's acting mayor, told CCTV News on Monday.

"Based on the current data, the proportion of confirmed cases imported from abroad in the early stage is about 10 percent, and the probability of confirmed cases may reach 15 percent with the addition of asymptomatic patients."

"It is estimated that 15 to 20 percent of the returnees will eventually be confirmed as COVID-19 cases," he added.

On Monday, the provincial virus control and prevention department offered a reward of up to 3,000 yuan (\$425) for information that assists in finding people who cross the border illegally.

In addition to provincial support, the central government also sent teams to facilitate the efforts.

Meanwhile, a mobile, negative-pressure laboratory with a daily coronavirus testing capacity of more than 1,000 has begun work in Suifenhe, People's Daily said on Tuesday.

Built by 15 experts from the National Institute for Viral Disease Control and Prevention at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the laboratory has greatly improved the city's daily testing capability and will play a key role in virus prevention and control, according to Wu Guizhen, Party secretary of the institute.

"The laboratory is more intelligent," she said. "As long as someone is perceived to enter, it will automatically enter the working state in a few seconds."

There are also another 10 professionals testing workers from the province who have joined the laboratory.

Among the infected cases, some have been found with severe conditions, and many inbound arrivals are businessmen between the ages of 40 and 50, according to Yu.

"They were exhausted after the long journey, which could have worsened their condition," he said. "There are 21 patients in serious condition, about one-third of whom have flu symptoms."

Construction was completed on Saturday of a makeshift hospital, which has been transformed from an office building and has more than 600 beds.

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All aboard



College students board a chartered train in Jinan, Shandong province, on Monday. More than 900 students will take this train, Shandong's first dedicated to college students, back to Shihzei University in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. CUI JIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Stringent measures taken in Guangdong to monitor inbound arrivals

By LI WENFANG in Guangzhou liwenfang@chinadaily.com.cn

As local coronavirus infections associated with overseas arrivals continue to increase in the country, stringent measures have been taken to trace and control the cases.

A number of provinces have reported such cases, with Guangdong recording 16, including 10 Chinese nationals, and 44 asymptomatic carriers associated with inbound arrivals by Saturday.

Guangdong had reported 183 imported cases, including 145 Chinese nationals, by Saturday.

The local coronavirus infection cases associated with those inbound arrivals were mostly caused by overseas travelers entering Guangdong before March 21,

Duan Yufei, director of the provincial health commission, said at a news conference in Guangzhou on Sunday.

Since that date, all people traveling from foreign destinations to Guangdong have been required to undergo medical observation at home or designated places and take nucleic acid tests for the virus.

All travelers entering the Chinese mainland through checkpoints in Guangdong province have been required to take nucleic acid tests for the novel coronavirus and undergo a 14-day quarantine at designated places since March 27.

To intercept any potential risks brought by travelers from overseas who entered Guangdong before March 21, community screenings have been carried out.

Guangdong has been implementing a "five-shield" system to prevent the spread of coronavirus infections from people arriving in China.

The system consists of status check at checkpoints, medical observation and isolation at designated venues, community screening, fever clinics and treatment at hospitals.

Since April 5, screenings of people from high-risk countries have been carried out in Guangdong, with 6,353 people having been checked as of Saturday.

The risk associated with imported cases is under control, said Lin Keqing, vice-governor of Guangdong.

By Saturday, the provincial capital of Guangzhou had reported 119 imported cases and 13 local con-

firmed patients related to imported cases.

It is good that infections related to imported cases have been found in Guangzhou, Zhong Nanshan, a prominent Chinese expert in respiratory diseases, said at another news conference in the city on Sunday.

The key to epidemic control is early detection and installing related measures. The situation indicates the importance of preventing crowded public gatherings.

Since the outbreak has yet to be brought under control outside the country, the current measures are correct, he said.

Meanwhile, the situation regarding cases among the African community in Guangzhou has caused much concern.

Executive Vice-Mayor Chen Zhiyong said on Monday 4,553 African people had been tested for the virus. Of those, 111 tested positive, 19 of which were imported cases. Some of them were asymptomatic carriers.

"The screenings led to the discovery of COVID-19 cases and makes them an important measure to safeguard the lives and health of African people in Guangzhou," said Tang Xiaoping, director of the city's health bureau.

The isolation and testing among African people has been identical to the measures for Chinese nationals and other foreigners in recent epidemic control work, said Chen Yongqiu, deputy director of the city's public security bureau.

Xinhua contributed to this story.