

HABSMUN 2020

Emergency briefing Paper

The question of the COVID-19 outbreak

**Background**

Coronaviruses first were identified during the 1960s and are currently believed to infect humans and a variety of animals. Since 2002, two coronaviruses commonly infecting animals had evolved and caused outbreaks in humans: SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV.

During December 2019, a novel coronavirus first called 2019-nCoV (now COVID-19) was isolated from three patients with pneumonia in Wuhan, the capital of the Hubei province, China. Genetic analysis revealed that it was closely related to SARS-CoV and two bat-derived SARS-like strains. The origin of the virus is not clear yet, with suggestions regarding the origin including unhygienic animals such as bats or pangolins from the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in Wuhan. It should also be noted that the Wuhan Institute of Virology is near to the wet market.

The latest WHO report suggests a fatality rate of 3.4%, higher than initially thought. Those most at risk include the very young, those over 60 and those with underlying conditions such as lung disease or diabetes. Symptoms include high fever; a cough and shortness of breath and the transmission mechanism is unclear.

There is evidence to suggest that the virus is mutating, with scientists identifying a more aggressive and fatal L strain responsible for around 70% of cases, and another, less aggressive S strain.

**Key Issues**

**Preventing the spread of COVID-19**

As of now, the understanding of how bad the situation could be is limited. The UK government has said that “widespread transmission” is highly likely and estimated that 1 in 5 people in their workforce could be off ill at its peak. Of great concern is the report by Gabriel Leung of the University of Hong Kong who told *The Guardian* on the 11th February that 60 % of the world’s population could contract COVID-19, which at the WHO estimated 3.4% fatality rate would cause over 150 million deaths worldwide. Commonly suggested measures include

* Closures or restrictions on the use of public transport
* School closures.
* Closure of public workspaces
* Banning large gatherings
* Troops supporting the emergency services and Police focusing on the most serious crimes and maintaining public order
* Legal abilities to mandate people to isolate or be quarantined

**Understanding and mitigating the economic impact**

Stock markets have taken a huge hit since the outbreak, with the FTSE 100 falling 11% since February when the WHO announced an emergency and markets seeing the worst daily falls since the financial crisis. The US has slashed interest rates as an attempt to address the situation and Chinese car sales have fallen by 92%. The OECD have stated that global growth “could halve” and if offices worldwide are forced to shut, coupled with massive uncertainty and huge supply chain issues, a potentially unprecedented global recession could ensue. The impact on global standards of living must be taken into account. On a shorter timescale, people forced to self-isolate may struggle financially without proper sick pay, which could force them into work despite showing symptoms, exacerbating the spread of COVID-19. Particularly at risk are those on zero-hours contracts and suchlike, with limited workers’ rights potentially having serious consequences. Price gouging is a controversial topic and one on which we seek to have a global consensus.

**Racism as a result of the outbreak**

On 30th January, the [WHO](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Health_Organization)'s Emergency Committee issued a statement advising all countries to be aware and mindful of the "principles of Article 3 of the IHR (the [International Health Regulations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Health_Regulations))," which they say is a caution against "actions that promote stigma or discrimination," when conducting national response measures to the outbreak. As a direct example of anti-Asian racism, in the UK Jonathan Mok, a student from Singapore was assaulted by a group of men who told him: "I don't want your coronavirus in my country." Preventing this rise of xenophobia, violence, and racism is a priority through education.

**Questions to consider**

* The most effective ways of containing the outbreak
* How to mitigate and respond to global economic challenges
* How to maintain individual standards of living and financial stability
* The issue of price gouging
* Preventing an increase in racism through direct attacks and everyday language that perpetuates stereotypes