

TFWA and ACI weigh in on coronavirus threat

Today officially marks the fourth day of Chinese New Year which would normally be marked with celebrations. However the mood has been somber due to the outbreak of the coronavirus (2019-



nCoV), more commonly known as the Wuhan virus, named after the city in China where it originated.

According to the World Health Organization, the coronavirus is part of a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV). This new virus is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans.

As of today there is 4,500 confirmed ill (Mostly in China), while at least 70 cases have been confirmed abroad. Hong Kong has officially closed its China border as the Wuhan virus continues to spread.

"Our first thoughts are with the victims of the coronavirus outbreak, and for our friends and business partners in China who are affected by the restrictions imposed. We stand with our industry colleagues in China who are currently working in very difficult and troubling circumstances," shared Alain Maingraud, President, Tax Free World Association

"Clearly, the situation is a source of great concern for everyone in the travel industry, and especially for the many companies catering to Chinese travelers around the world. It is still a little early to assess the full impact of the outbreak, but it is obvious that travel to and from China has been severely hit and is likely to continue to decline in the short term. This is a major concern for duty free & travel retail worldwide. Like our business partners, we are monitoring the situation closely and hope that the relevant authorities are successful in their attempts to contain the outbreak."

Threats to travel

China has taken drastic measures since the discovery of the virus that originated in December 2019 in Wuhan, a city with a population of 11 million residents.

In addition to the immediate construction of a quarantined hospital to manage the crisis, a travel ban was imposed last week in the area's outgoing airport and railway stations, as well as the suspension of public transportation. Chinese officials have since expanded that ban to 17 surrounding cities with a combined population of more than 50 million people, a number that may increase in the following days. However, Zhou Xianwang, the Mayor of Wuhan, shared that up to 5 million people had left the city before the travel ban was imposed ahead of Chinese New Year.

Airports Council International (ACI) issued guidance on global communicable disease transmission in an effort to share how national regulators and health authorities will introduce measures directly affecting airports and the aviation industry.

The [Advisory Bulletin: Transmission of Communicable Diseases](#) is intended as guidance for airports that can be modified to the local situation as necessary and used in discussion with local authorities and national regulators when determining appropriate actions.

"The health and welfare of travelers, staff and the public, and to reduce the opportunities for dissemination of communicable diseases, are the priorities for the aviation industry following the recent novel coronavirus outbreak," ACI World Director General Angela Gittens said.

She continued, "The recommendations are designed to reduce exposure to an infectious agent at airports and to improve the response to health-related emergencies by establishing standards and procedures for rapid decision-making and action."

Will this panic be short-lived? It may be too early to assess the outcome. Maingreud conveyed his optimism for the travel retail industry: "Our industry has proved its resilience time and again, and working together we will find ways to limit the impact of this latest challenge."