WHO GHANA MEDIA ADVISORY NOTE

Novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) outbreak

31 January 2020

I BACKGROUND

Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that infect both animals and humans. Human coronaviruses can cause mild disease like a common cold, while others cause more severe disease (such as MERS - Middle East Respiratory Syndrome and SARS – Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome). Some coronaviruses that are found in animals can infect humans – these are known as zoonotic diseases.

Human coronaviruses are usually spread through droplets (coughing) and close personal unprotected contact with an infected person (touching, shaking hands).

On 31 December 2019, WHO was alerted to several cases of pneumonia in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China. The virus did not match any other known virus. This raised concern because when a virus is new, how it affects people may not be well known.

One week later, on 7 January 2020, Chinese authorities confirmed that they had identified a new virus. The new virus is a coronavirus, which is a family of viruses that are known to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS. This new virus was temporarily named “2019-nCoV.”

Key Updates:

1. The WHO Director General on the advice of the International Health Regulations Emergency Committee has decided to declare the novel coronavirus outbreak a public health emergency of international concern.

2. WHO does not recommend any travel or trade restrictions for countries in the African region. This is because the social disruption they cause, and the intensive use of resources required outweigh the potential benefits.

3. There continues to be no reported cases of the novel coronavirus in the African region. For now, any case is likely to be imported and so it is vital that countries implement effective screening of passengers at airports.
4. WHO is scaling up efforts to support countries to put in place measures to rapidly confirm or rule out novel coronavirus cases, establish a platform for isolating suspected or confirmed cases, get good information out to the public and pre-position supplies.

5. WHO’s risk assessment is that the coronavirus outbreak is a high risk globally and Africa has close ties with China and other Asian countries. There are many links between Asia and the African continent and so it is crucial that all countries in the region ramp up their preparedness efforts. Much remains to be understood about this new virus and it’s too early to draw definitive conclusions about how it is transmitted. WHO has issued interim guidance on what preparedness measures countries should take and will update this information in consultation with networks of experts across the globe.

6. The WHO Africa Regional Director has sent out a guidance note to all countries on how to prepare for a possible novel coronavirus outbreak.

7. It is vital that countries put in place effective screening mechanisms at airports and other major points of entry to ensure that the first cases are detected quickly. Currently active screening has been established in most of countries with direct links or a high volume of travel to China.

8. WHO has identified 13 top priority countries (Algeria, Angola Cote d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia) which due to their direct links or high volume of travel to China need to increase their preparedness measures. The top priority countries are WHO’s first areas of focus, but the organization will support all countries in the region in their preparation efforts.

9. WHO is working with our networks of researchers and other experts to coordinate regional work on surveillance, epidemiology, modelling, diagnostics, clinical care and treatment, and other ways to identify, manage the disease and limit onward transmission. WHO has issued interim guidance for countries, which is regularly updated to take into account the current situation.