

# Coronavirus Spread in China Slows Sharply But Doubt Remains

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While infections in the rest of the world accelerate, the coronavirus epidemic is showing signs of easing at its center -- China -- with new cases slowing dramatically and recoveries gathering pace. Still, doubt remains over whether the government's [statistics](#) show the full picture.

China reported 139 new confirmed cases of the coronavirus on Wednesday. That was a slight rise from Tuesday, which had been the lowest number in almost six weeks and the fewest since the national government started releasing data on Jan. 21. Of those, 134 cases were in Hubei province, where the virus first emerged in December and which still accounts for the majority of infections and deaths worldwide.

## Plateauing Outbreak

Coronavirus statistics in China show steady improvement

Source: Health commissions of China, Hubei and Wuhan

Eighty-four percent of Chinese cases, 97% of critical cases and more than 96% of deaths are within the province, which was placed under mass quarantine by the government on Jan. 23 to slow the virus' spread to the rest of the country. The ongoing lockdown of the region of 60 million people has led to widespread suffering and [scores of preventable deaths](#) as the local medical system collapsed under the strain.

The lockdown also meant that China's fatalities from the pathogen have been confined almost entirely to the province. As of Wednesday, 4.3% of people who were confirmed to have the virus in Hubei have died, while that rate is 0.8% in China outside Hubei.

## Tragedy in Hubei

China has almost totally contained the deaths from coronavirus to Hubei

Source: National and Hubei health commissions

Over the past three weeks, China's number of recovered patients has surged both in Hubei and the rest of the country, with the government sending in thousands of health-care workers to help in Hubei. Almost 65% of those who've been officially diagnosed with the disease are now better and out of hospital, according to the [data](#) from the National Health Commission on Thursday.

## Getting Better

More than 20 times as many people recover each day as get sick

Source: National Health Commission

However, that may not be as comforting as it looks, with a [report](#) from Wuhan that a man who died due to a

coronavirus infection had earlier been discharged from hospital after recovering and testing negative. The report from Chinese media The Paper was later removed from the internet.

Another area of concern is the growing number of people infected with the coronavirus coming to China. There had been 20 such cases through Wednesday, according to the statement from National Health Commission. The customs bureau [reported](#) on Wednesday that there had been 75 cases of confirmed novel coronavirus cases among inbound passengers as of March 3. It is unknown why the two numbers are different.

Mistrust lingers over China's official statistics, which have been repeatedly revised through the course of the outbreak, including an [extraordinary](#) addition of nearly 15,000 cases of infection on Feb. 13. It's also changed the definition of what is a confirmed case of infection multiple times.

### [What's Going On With China's Coronavirus Case and Death Numbers?](#)



One area of confusion has been over how to account for people who don't have symptoms but test positive for the disease in a phenomenon known as asymptomatic infection. In the Feb. 19 [revision](#) to the treatment guidelines, the National Health Commission said asymptomatic cases should not be counted as confirmed cases.

At a World Health Organization briefing on Tuesday, infectious disease expert Maria Van Kerkhove said that about 1% of cases in China are asymptomatic at first, but 75% of those patients eventually develop symptoms.

This means that provinces not counting asymptomatic cases in their official tally are likely under-reporting their numbers. There's some evidence of that: Chinese media outlet Caixin [reported](#) that Heilongjiang province in northern China had 104 asymptomatic infections which it did not add to its total of 480 confirmed cases on Feb. 25.

China does not release the number of asymptomatic infections in its daily nationwide tally, underscoring the uncertainty over whether the outbreak is truly contained at its heart.

— *With assistance by James Mayger, and Natalie Lung*

(Updates throughout with latest data, case of man who died after being released from hospital, and reports of infected travelers coming to China.)