

China's Uptick in Respiratory Illness Sparks Concerns From Neighbors

The virus outbreak in China coincides with the five-year anniversary of COVID-19, with the WHO recently renewing requests for China to share related data.

16

14

Save



A woman wearing mask passes by mannequin heads wearing masks in a hat shop in Beijing on Sept. 9, 2022. Ng Han Guan/AP Photo

By Zhang Ting and Cindy Li

A recent surge in respiratory infections in China has drawn attention from neighboring countries and regions, with the Chinese public expressing concerns about the severity of the new outbreak amid ongoing distrust of the ruling Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) health reporting post-COVID.

Official data from the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, dated to the last week of 2024, reported that multiple flu-like illnesses are currently on the rise in China. The primary pathogens reported in outpatients and emergency wards were influenza, human metapneumovirus (HMPV), and rhinoviruses. Severe acute respiratory infections were attributed to influenza viruses, mycoplasma pneumoniae, and HMPV.

The report noted that HMPV, a lesser-known common winter respiratory disease, has caused many children under 14 in China's northern provinces to fall ill. Cases of HMPV surged the most in the past week to become the second most prevalent cause of respiratory infections in China's north after influenza.

Since HMPV was first detected by Dutch researchers in 2001, it has been found worldwide. Common symptoms are similar to those of influenza, including cough, fever, nasal congestion, and shortness of breath, which are signs of upper respiratory tract infections.

The virus can also lead to complications such as bronchitis, tracheitis, pneumonia, asthma, or ear infections. Severe infections may result in serious lower respiratory tract infections.

According to the world-renowned medical institution the Cleveland Clinic, young children, adults over 65, and people with weakened immune systems are at high risk for severe HMPV infections.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning has downplayed the concern among the populace about respiratory illness, attributing the increase in cases to a winter peak of respiratory infections.

“At present, the scale and intensity of the epidemic are lower than last year,” she said in a regular press conference on Jan. 3.

“What I can tell you is that the Chinese government attaches great importance to the health of the Chinese people and foreign citizens in China, and traveling to China is safe.”

Treatment for HMPV mainly focuses on symptom management. Most HMPV patients can manage symptoms at home until they feel better, while those with severe symptoms may require hospitalization.

The increasing cases of HMPV, a respiratory virus that has symptoms similar to those of COVID-19, are causing concern among the Chinese populace, who are wary of the transparency and accuracy of the CCP’s public health information following significant coverups in the COVID-19 pandemic. Claims of overcrowded hospitals on Chinese social media have also sparked widespread concern.

Neighbors Say They’re Monitoring Situation

The reports of overwhelmed Chinese hospitals and crematoriums have put authorities of neighboring countries and regions on alert for potential developments of public concern.

The Macau Health Bureau stated on Dec. 26, 2024, that it has been closely monitoring the spread of HMVP in mainland China and has urged local residents to strengthen preventive measures.

In Taiwan, Tseng Shu-Hui, deputy director-general of the Taiwan Centers for Disease Control (CDC), told local media on Dec. 25, 2024, that related cases of HMPV have already spread and been detected on the island. Taiwan’s CDC will continue to monitor the situation and will provide timely updates if any abnormalities are found, she said.

Vietnam’s Ministry of Health stated on Jan. 5 that it has prepared a brief report on the reported cases of HMPV infection in China. The

department said it contacted the WHO's office in Vietnam and the Asia-Pacific region, as well as the representative office of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention under the International Health Regulations, and was told that, as of now, the WHO has not received any official information from China regarding its HMPV caseload.

Malaysia reported 327 known HMPV cases in 2024. The Malaysian health ministry has urged the public to stay alert.

“The public is advised to proactively take care of their health and prevent infection to others, especially in enclosed and crowded areas,” the ministry said in a statement, according to Singaporean newspaper The Straits Times. “This includes those planning to travel to countries at risk.”

Datuk Amar Sim Kui Hian, the minister of Public Health, Housing, and Local Government in Sarawak, a state of Malaysia, reminded the public that while the WHO had not classified HMPV as an international public health emergency, “we must not let our guard down.”

The experience with COVID-19 has taught everyone how to cope with viruses, he told local media on Jan. 5.

“Frequent hand washing, wearing masks, and maintaining good personal hygiene are key to preventing the spread of viruses.”

India convened a joint monitoring group meeting in response to the rising cases of respiratory illnesses reported in China over the past few weeks.

Indian authorities said the government is “well-prepared” to handle respiratory illnesses and that its surveillance shows no unusual surge so far.

“Union Health Ministry is closely monitoring the situation in China through all available channels and the WHO has been requested to

share timely updates regarding the situation,” read a [Jan. 5 post](#) by the country’s Ministry of Health on social media platform X.

WHO Demands China’s COVID Data

This round of winter respiratory illness in China marks the five-year anniversary of the emergence of COVID-19, with the WHO recently renewing its unfulfilled requests for China to share access to data to help determine the origins of COVID-19.

“We continue to call on China to share data and access so we can understand the origins of COVID-19,” reads a [WHO statement](#) on Dec. 30, 2024.

“This is a moral and scientific imperative. Without transparency, sharing, and cooperation among countries, the world cannot adequately prevent and prepare for future epidemics and pandemics.”

In December 2019, the first case of COVID-19 emerged in Wuhan, China. The ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP)’s initial concealment of the outbreak, including the silencing of [doctors](#) and [citizen reporters](#), was followed by the rapid spread of the virus, evolving into a global pandemic that caused a significant number of deaths, as previously reported by The Epoch Times.

Sign up for the News Alerts newsletter. You’ll get the biggest developing stories so you can stay ahead of the game. [Sign up with 1-click >>](#)



Zhang Ting

Author



Cindy Li

Author

Author’s Selected Articles

Wealthiest Places in the World: Luxembourg First, Macau Second, Hong Kong at 15th, Behind Taiwan

May 11, 2024



Transnational FBI Case Unveils Complex Saga Involving China's Student Spies

Oct 21, 2019



On the Chinese Communist Party's Tactics for Stealing Western Military Technologies: Part 2 of 2

Mar 10, 2018



On the Chinese Communist Party's Tactics for Stealing Western Military Technologies: Part 1 of 2

Mar 10, 2018

