

The Macao SAR Government urges:

- Let's all persist;
- Wash hands frequently;
- Wear a mask properly;
- Avoid crowd gathering;
- Keep a social distance;
- Declare health conditions;
- Reduce leaving Macao.

Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre

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COVID-19-FREE MEDICAL CERTIFICATES, THOUGH NEEDED FOR FLYING TO MACAU, WILL NOT BE OFFERED BY PUBLIC MEDICAL ENTITIES FOR OUTBOUND TRAVEL P2

BEIJING SAYS NO PLANS TO LIMIT EXPORT OF ANTI-VIRUS SUPPLIES P6

LAS VEGAS LEARNS FROM MACAU AS THE CITY MULLS HOW TO REOPEN CASINOS WITH COVID-19 PREVENTIVE MEASURES P3

AP PHOTO



United Nations
Secretary-General António Guterres is urging stepped up efforts to prepare Africa for the expected spread of the coronavirus pandemic, warning that the continent "could end up suffering the greatest impacts." The U.N. chief told a video conference with African ambassadors to the United Nations that COVID-19 "is in no way of Africa's making." But like the climate crisis, he said, Africa could be hurt most. More on p8

AP PHOTO



Hong Kong reported just one more infected person yesterday, the fifth consecutive day with a single-digit increase. Its tally stands at 1,017 with four deaths. The city has implemented strict social distancing measures among others.

AP PHOTO



Japan Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has expanded a state of emergency to all of Japan from just Tokyo and other urban areas as the virus continues to spread. Abe also announced cash handouts of 100,000 yen (\$930) for each of Japan's 120 million citizens. He said the expanded state of emergency is aimed at reducing the movement of people and achieving as much as 80% social distancing.

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CYBERSECURITY GREENLIGHT

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RENATO MARQUES



COVID-19-FREE MEDICAL CERTIFICATES NOT ISSUED BY PUBLIC MEDICAL FACILITIES

ANTHONY LAM

SHOULD Macau residents need a certificate stating they are not infected with Covid-19 for their necessary outbound travel, they will not be able to obtain one from a public medical institution in the SAR, confirmed Lo Iek Long, medical director of the Conde São Januário Hospital (CHCSJ) yesterday.

However, new rules announced this week require all those traveling to Macau – including the city's own residents – to present a copy of such a certificate. Failure to present one will result them in being denied from boarding the flight to Macau.

The Civil Aviation Authority has coordinated the dissemination of this piece of information to all airlines operating flights to Macau, the Health Bureau (SSM) confirmed.

Indeed, the sudden change of policy has affected at least two people. Both of them are Macau residents currently in Taiwan, where Covid-19 tests are not conducted on request.

The first resident is in need of flying back to Macau for a family member's funeral. The resident thus contacted the Tourism Crisis Management Office (GGCT) about his or her case. After individual consideration by the SSM, a green light was given to the resident to fly to Macau, on the condition that



extra caution should be exercised during the flight.

The second resident is working in Taiwan but with the employment contract ending April 20. He or she is required to leave the island by April 29, believed to be due to visa expiration. The journalist who reported the case yesterday said the resident had contacted the GGCT for assistance but could not get an answer.

Lo reiterated that the measure was implemented with public health concerns in mind. He added

that exemptions could be made if a resident's return is necessary or mandatory, as well as when such a certificate is unobtainable in the place in which they are staying.

The medical director declined to expressly list all criteria for the waiver or exemption, but stressed that all considerations are made on an individual basis.

"We are unlikely to publicize the criteria," Lo said. "But we won't hide anything. The main purpose is for public health."

He also said that all cases will be

treated equally, but collective benefits will be prioritized. "It is not a rational action to hurt the interest of the larger population for a single person's need," the doctor stated. "After all, so far we have only made one single exemption."

Once again, the doctor reminded Macau residents to stay in the city and avoid border crossings.

As for the bodies of the deceased, they will be transported to neighboring Zhuhai if they are to be cremated. That is because no such facility exists in Macau. When

asked whether concerned family members will obtain waiver on certain public health measures, the SSM and the Public Security Police Force said that Macau residents have complete freedom to exit the territory.

With that said, it is up to Zhuhai to decide what types of measures will be applied to these Macau residents, answered Lo. The CHCSJ medical director added that the local government will communicate with Zhuhai's authorities with regards to the arrangements.

AL passes cybersecurity law targeting fraudulent mobile base stations

JULIE ZHU

THE Legislative Assembly (AL) yesterday passed amendments to the cybersecurity law, which criminalizes the operation of fraudulent mobile base stations.

The bill mainly involves four major amendments: the specification of a crime for fraudulent mobile base station operation; the specification of a crime for improperly disclosing a cybersecurity flaw; the definition of

invasion of key infrastructure as public crime; and the extension of the local security authority's authorization to obtain online statistics from jurisdictions outside of Macau.

According to the law, utilizing fraudulent mobile base stations to make a profit or for the commission of other crimes, such as spreading illegal advertisements or issuing pornographic content, constitute aggregated offences and are punishable by im-

prisonment for between one and five years.

The amendment to the cybersecurity law aims to synthesize the city's cybersecurity regulations in order to strengthen the protection of critical infrastructure operators and computer systems used by the Central Government's organizations in Macau specifically.

The amended law will come into effect on July 1.

During yesterday's AL discussion, only lawmaker Sulu Sou asked

questions about the bill, prompting criticism from Secretary for Security Wong Sio Chak. Sou asked the government representatives about the definition of data, wondering whether private conversations would also be forcibly accessed. In response, Wong expressed his discomfort at being repeatedly questioned about the same matter, especially when the topics had already been discussed at the First Standing Committee of the AL.

"The committee [of lawmakers] already reached a consensus. There is no need for me to repeat the same discussion over and over again," responded Wong.

Prior to yesterday's AL plenary meeting, government representatives attended three discussions with the AL committee. However, since AL committee meetings are closed-door gatherings, the lawmakers' questions as well as government statements made during these "private" meetings remain unavailable to members of the Macau public.

According to Wong, when the police authority suspects that a computer contains data related to

a crime and delaying the retrieval of the data would cause significant damage, the police authority may access the data through its own technical means. Under such circumstances, the police authority must report its actions to a judge.

Wong claimed that the practice fully complies with the provisions and general principles of the criminal procedure code of Macau.

The Secretary for Security also remarked that all of these amendments are adjusted in accordance with the relevant legal standards and practices around the world and are fully in line with international conventions.

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Lawmaker wants all non-local workers exempt from minimum wage

LAWMAKER Song Pek Kei has stated that there will be “fairness” and “equity” only when Macau’s law excludes all non-local workers from minimum wage policies.

During yesterday’s Legislative Assembly (AL), Song said she was not satisfied with the employees’ minimum wage law, as presented by the government, because it included non-resident workers.

The bill proposes a minimum wage of 6,656 patacas per month for all workers, with the exception of domestic helpers and workers with a disability.

The exclusion of domestic helpers is related to the nature of this profession. According to government representatives, domestic service employment involves incalculable financial factors, for instance, an employer may provide accommodation as

well as other benefits to workers. Such uncountable factors make this occupation unsuitable to be included in the minimum wage regime.

Lawmaker Song Pek Kei approved the domestic service minimum wage exclusion and further developed a theory, which she considers to be more “consistent and fair.”

“All non-local workers should be excluded,” Song declared.

“Why exclude just the domestic helpers?”

Song said her concern for the city’s small and medium-sized enterprises, in particular the micro and smaller-sized companies, is behind this belief. She explicitly acknowledged that local SMEs have a shortage of non-local workers. According to Song, the greatest expenditure of local SMEs is that associated with human resources. For example, some SMEs are obliged to pay for the lodging of non-local workers.

“As SMEs depend significantly on non-local workers, all non-local workers should be excluded from the minimum wage,” said Song.

Besides worrying about local SMEs, Song is also deeply concerned about local families with domestic helpers. She believes that once non-local workers are guaranteed a minimum wage, domestic helpers, for example, will leave the domestic service industry to join other industries in order to receive the minimum wage.

“Nobody will be a domestic helper anymore. Employing families are more at risk because their helpers will think about jumping to other jobs. They would rather do cleaning or security work to get at least 6,656 patacas [per month]. They [domestic helpers] will have more leverage when bargaining,” said Song.

In response to Song, lawmaker Sulu Sou asserted the “unsuitability” of excluding all non-local workers because the exclusion would consequently put local workers’ jobs at stake if their work could be done cheaper.

The minimum wage law for all job types is expected to come into effect on November 1. The government expects that more than 24,000 workers will benefit from this law. **JZ**

TRAFFIC ACCIDENT INJURES WOMAN AGED 67

A 67-year-old woman was hit by a taxi while walking across a zebra crossing on Wednesday night, sustaining injuries to her left thigh, chest and both hands. The traffic accident occurred on Avenida do Coronel Mesquita, near Colegio Dom Bosco bus stop. The woman was taken to the Conde S. Januário Hospital for medical treatment in the company of her family. Firefighters reported that the woman lost consciousness on her way to the hospital. In May last year, a taxi injured three people after allegedly failing to give way at a pedestrian crossing. In September last year, a 71-year-old woman died after a bus hit her at a zebra crossing.

THOUSANDS APPLY FOR SECOND GOV’T PAID TRAINING

A total of 1,529 residents submitted applications on the first day of the second phase of the Labour Affairs Bureau’s (DSAL) paid work training program. The most popular training courses are related to interior design, furniture design, electronic technician training, and hotel lobby operation. The training program offers the attendees a certain amount of money once the course is completed. A worker taking the course can receive a maximum of 6,656 patacas upon completion. The entire program provides 2,000 training positions involving 20 types of jobs. Workers who attend 80% of the courses, participate in the relevant exams, and accept the DSAL’s offers for employment assistance can also receive a subsidy. In the first phase, 47 participants attended the bureau’s employment-matching session, of which 40 were eventually hired.

FLORA GARDEN PEDESTRIAN TUNNEL CONSTRUCTION TO START NEXT YEAR

The local government is expecting to commence the construction of a pedestrian tunnel at Guia Hill in the second quarter of 2021. The tunnel will pass through Guia Hill, connecting ZAPE and Avenida de Horta e Costa. One side will end at the gas station next to Avenida Dr. Rodrigo Rodrigues, while the other side will end at Flora Garden. Once the tunnel is built, the distance between the two places will be shortened to approximately 400 meters from the current 1,100 meters. The maximum anticipated construction period is 800 working days.

Vegas casino executives discuss reopening with dealers in masks

CASINO executives from rival companies are informally discussing what Las Vegas will look like when one of the largest U.S. tourist destinations reopens to guests. Some of the measures suggested resemble practices that have been adopted in Macau since casinos were allowed to reopen in mid-February after an unprecedented 15-day suspension ordered by the government.

The deliberations in the U.S. have included potentially allowing small businesses off of the famous

Strip to open first, so that locals could get back to work, according to people familiar with the talks. The executives have also discussed opening facilities nearby so that all casino workers - and perhaps even tourists - could get tested for the coronavirus.

The city, the largest gambling market in the U.S., would open its giant casinos with as little as one-third of their rooms available. Entrances would be limited, and guests’ temperatures would be checked with noninvasive methods. Casino em-

ployees would wear masks and gloves, and gamblers would sit at least a chair apart at blackjack tables.

The moves are similar to what is already occurring in Macau, where casinos closed for 15 days in February and reopened under tight restrictions. The city’s casinos have resumed operation but are serving record-low numbers of patrons in the wake of border entry restrictions applied in Macau, Hong Kong and southern China’s Guangdong Province.

In Las Vegas, companies are also discus-

sing enhanced cleaning techniques, something unions have requested.

“We’re asking the companies to have more cleaning everywhere - the rooms, casino, special teams to work with new chemicals,” Geoconda Argüello-Kline, secretary-treasurer of Culinary Workers Union Local 226, said last week. The casinos “have to have more people, so the people can have the area more clean.”

While Nevada has dozens of casinos, a handful of operators, including MGM Resorts Internatio-

nal, Caesars Entertainment Corp., Las Vegas Sands Corp. and Wynn Resorts Ltd., dominate the action on the Las Vegas Strip.

Nevada Governor Steve Sisolak, a Democrat, ordered all casinos in the state to close for 30 days in mid-March to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. He extended that order until April 30, but on Tuesday said the state wasn’t even close to ending the restrictions.

“This is not going to be a political decision for me, as for when to open,” he said. “I don’t have an exact number. I’ll take a lot of advice from our medical folks and determine what’s in the best interest of keeping all Nevadans safe.” **MDT/BLOOMBERG**

PLANS TO USE TAIPA FERRY TERMINAL AS AIRPORT EXTENSION STILL IN INITIAL PHASE

LYNZY VALLES

PLANS to use the Taipa Maritime Terminal in Cotai as an extension of the Macau International Airport are still in an initial phase, Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raimundo do Rosário has said.

The local airport received 9.6 million tourist arrivals last year, when it was designed only to receive 7.8 million annual passengers.

"The Pac On Terminal is huge and currently has more space, so we intend to use part of the terminal to create Terminal 2," Rosário told the press on the sidelines of a Legislative Assembly committee meeting.

According to the official, the second terminal will be able to handle 1.4 million passengers per year, adding that the expansion aims to lighten the load of the local airport.

Terminal 2 was said to be connected to the airport by a fenced off special corridor in line with international aviation security rules.

Earlier this week, the Times inquired with the Office of the Secretary for Transport and Public Works to ask further details about the plan, however, the office briefly replied only that "information will be disclosed



LYNZY VALLES

to the public soon."

According to the airport master plan report back in March 2019, which was submitted to the central government, the plan noted that the expansion would be rolled out in two phases.

The first development phase has been set to receive a capacity of 11 million passengers – which corresponds to the baseline forecast traffic for 2025 – while the second phase could accommodate up to 15 million passengers.

This phase corresponds to the demand level projected

in 2033 and 2041 for the high scenario and baseline, respectively.

This master plan was approved by the SAR government in July 2016 and was incorporated into the Five-Year Development Plan of the Macau SAR (2016-2020).

"We have been dealing with the issue [of expansion plans] for several years. When we started, there was still no 85 square kilometers of territorial waters. However, the procedures have changed, so we are still in this process with a view to obtaining, as soon as possi-

ble, an approval for that same plan," said the Secretary.

Further, the Macau International Airport has last month started construction work for the Passenger Terminal Building South Extension, which will be integrated into the existing passenger terminal building to enhance its handling capacity.

Expected to be completed by the middle of 2021, the expansion would allow passenger handling capacity to increase to ten million passengers per year from 7.8 million.



RENATO MARQUES

Main Taipa road to be partially blocked this weekend

AVENIDA de Guimarães will be partially blocked tomorrow and Sunday due to work on the construction of a footbridge laid above the central axis of the road.

The avenue connects the roundabout at the Macau Stadium to the roundabout at "Jardim Dragão Presioso" Building. The footbridge is being built to extend the potential coverage of the Light Rapid Transit (LRT) station right in front of the Macau Stadium.

As part of the construction process, sections of the footbridge will be lifted up from the ground and placed onto supports. The road blockage is a result of this work.

From 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on both days, traffic will not be allowed towards Jardim Dragão Presioso Building along the section between the Macau Stadium and Rua de Seng Tou. As such, the exits on those lanes of Avenida de Guimarães for Rua de Bragança and for Rua de Seng Tou will be closed.

As a result of the work, several bus routes will make stops at different bus stops from their usual ones. The routes concerned are No. 11, 35, MT5, 37, H3, 36 and MT2. Bus users are reminded to familiarize themselves with the arrangements before departing for destinations near the construction area. **AL**

TOXIC SUBSTANCE FOUND IN THAI SODA WATER BRAND EXCEEDS REGULATION LIMIT

BROMATE has been found in quantities over the legally permitted threshold in a batch of soda water from Thailand, the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) has announced.

The brand, Chang, is one of the two Thai soda water brands popular in Macau. The substance was discovered during a regular spot check jointly conducted by the bureau and the city's Consumer Council.

The affected batch of soda water was packaged in 325 milliliter

bottles and carries the batch code 23012020, which can be seen on the side of the bottle wrap and above the nutrition information table. The best before date of the batch of soda water is January 23, 2021, and is printed below the batch code.

The IAM revealed that test results showed an average of 0.0462 milligrams per liter of bromate was found in the sample of soda water. The level exceeds the legal permitted density.

Significant consumption of bromate may cause intestinal problems in humans. Such symptoms include nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. It may affect the liver and the nervous system in severe cases.

The drink's wholesaler and retailers have been notified of the problem and ordered to suspend all sales of the product. Buyers who have purchased the affected batch have been urged to stop consuming them immediately. **AL**

UM DEVELOPS NEW TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE CANCER PRECISION MEDICINE

A research team at the University of Macau's (UM) Faculty of Health Sciences has made a breakthrough in optical molecular imaging and precision medicine for cancer treatment, according to a statement issued yesterday by the university. The team has developed an efficient strategy to assist with imaging-guided cancer diagnostic tests and phototherapy.

The study, led by Associate Professor Yuan Zhen and his PhD student Men Xiaojun, paves the way for clinical applications of organic semiconductor nanoprobe, according to the UM. It was published in the international journal *Advanced Functional Materials* and was supported



Associate Professor Yuan Zhen

by the UM and the Macao Science and Technology Development Fund.

Professor Yuan's academic work focuses on cutting-edge research and development in laser, ultrasound and biomedical technologies, as well as their clinical and pre-clinical applications in neuroimaging

and neurosciences.

The professor is one of the pioneers in the development of continuous wave near-infrared functional imaging, a technology that has been approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration for clinical diagnostic tests for brain diseases. **DB**

Chief Executive to announce department shuffle Monday

CHIEF Executive Ho Iat Seng will announce the restructure of several key government departments in his first Policy Address on Monday, reported public broadcaster Radio Macau.

According to the broadcaster, the restructure will include the transfer of the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) from under the purview of the Secretariat for Social Affairs and Culture to that of the Secretariat for Economy and Finance.

The MGTO's main responsibility is to implement and analyze the tourism policies of the Macau SAR. However, it also organizes and coordinates some of Macau's largest events, including the annual Macau International Fireworks Display Contest and the International Film Festival and Awards - Macau (IFFAM).

The restructure will also



see the Higher Education Bureau (DSES), which is responsible for tertiary education in Macau, integrated into the general education authority, the Education and Youth Affairs Bureau (DSEJ). Radio Macau also reported that DSES director Sou Chio Fai, who has led the bureau since he ceased to be DSEJ director in 2011, is expected to retire in August.

The Office for the Deve-

lopment of the Energy Sector will be placed under the scope of the Environmental Protection Bureau, Radio Macau said.

Secretary Ao Ieong U heads the Secretariat for Social Affairs and Culture in the Macau SAR - a diverse portfolio with interests spanning healthcare, education, sports and promotion of the arts - while Lei Wai Nong presides over the Secretariat for Eco-

nomy and Finance.

The secretaries were both appointed to their roles for the first time by Ho Iat Seng in December last year. Both have frequented the daily press conferences organized by the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center since January to brief the public on matters related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Public administration reform was one of Ho Iat Seng's major manifesto pledges during his candidacy for Chief Executive.

The major shakeup dwarfs the minor departmental restructure seen during Chui Sai On's second term as Chief Executive, when several public entities were transferred to the authority of the Cultural Affairs Bureau and the Sports Bureau from the now-defunct Civic and Municipal Affairs Bureau, itself restructured as the Municipal Affairs Bureau in January 2019. **DB**

ACADEMIC SAYS 'STAY HOME' POLICY MAY INCREASE RISK OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

THE current Covid-19 pandemic and the consequential extensive "stay home" policy in Macau and other places may result in more domestic violence cases, Cecilia Ho, an academic of social work at the Macau Polytechnic Institute told Portuguese newspaper Ponto Final.

At a session of the government's daily press conference, Tang Yuk Wa, acting vice director of the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS), confirmed that more cases of "household conflict" have been reported to the bureau, although Tang did not use the term "domestic violence".

However, local facilities lack the capacity to host victims, if required to do so. Three organizations that provide shelter service for domestic violence victims, namely Caritas Macau, the Good Shepherd Association and the Women's General Association of Macau (AGMM), said that their facilities can accommodate few to no extra people.

The IAS responded to the newspaper report by stating that sufficient spaces are provided by these organizations, citing the drop in the average occupancy rate from 90% in 2017 to 70% now.

According to the Domestic Violence Law of the city, the administration should, where necessary, deliver domestic violence victims to shelters in order to ensure no further harm will be caused to them. **AL**

AD

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Beijing says no plans to limit export of anti-virus supplies

CHINA won't restrict exports of medical goods needed to fight the coronavirus pandemic, a government spokesman said yesterday, amid global tension over scarce masks and ventilators.

China, the biggest maker of surgical masks and other products, announced last week it would start inspecting exports to make sure they meet quality standards following Western complaints some test kits and other products were faulty.

"China has not and will not restrict the export of epidemic prevention materials," said a Commerce Ministry spokesman, Gao Feng.

The government hasn't responded to questions about whether inspections might increase the time required to fill foreign orders, but Gao said Beijing has taken steps to "speed up customs clearance" while "ensuring the export quality of epidemic prevention materials."

U.S. officials, including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in a call with top Chinese foreign policy adviser Yang Jiechi on Wednesday, have expressed frustration

with bureaucratic and other hurdles that American companies are facing in trying to export goods made in their Chinese plants that are considered key to fighting the pandemic.

Officials have made the point that the products, including PPE, are being made by American manufacturers in China and that the companies should be allowed to export them as they see fit.

President Donald Trump said this month he would try to block manufacturing giant 3M Co. from exporting N95 masks to other countries. 3M warned other governments might retaliate and said later an agreement was reached to allow foreign sales.

The Chinese customs agency said last week it would start treating masks, ventilators, surgical gowns, goggles and other supplies as medical goods.

That requires exporters to submit proof that their products are approved by regulators in destination countries. The government said goods will be inspected to confirm they meet quality standards before they are exported. AP

AP PHOTO



Takeaways from internal documents on China's virus res

ON Jan. 14, China's top health agency told provincial officials that they were facing a likely epidemic from a new coronavirus — but didn't alert the public for six days.

Internal documents obtained by The Associated Press show the National Health Commission ordered secret pandemic preparations, even as they downplayed the outbreak on national television.

President Xi Jinping warned the public on the seventh day, Jan. 20. By then, more than 3,000 people had been infected during nearly a week of silence, according to retrospective infection data.

Takeaways from the internal documents:

THAILAND JOLTS CHINA AWAKE

For almost two weeks, China's Center for Disease Control did not register any cases from local officials,

internal bulletins obtained by the AP confirm. Yet during that Jan. 5-17 period, hundreds of patients were appearing in hospitals not just in the city of Wuhan but across the country.

Doctors and nurses in Wuhan say there were many signs the coronavirus could be transmitted between people by late December. But officials muzzled medical workers who tried to report such cases. They required staff to report to supervisors before sending information higher. And they punished doctors who warned about the disease.

The muffling of warnings left top leaders in the dark. It took the first confirmed case outside China, in Thailand on Jan. 13, to jolt leaders in Beijing into recognizing the possible pandemic before them. An internal memo cites China's top health official, Ma Xiaowei, as saying the situation had "changed

significantly" because of the possible spread of the virus abroad.

'THE MOST SEVERE CHALLENGE SINCE SARS'

The memo, on a secret Jan. 14 teleconference held by Ma, shows that Chinese officials were deeply alarmed and had come to a much grimmer assessment than they were letting on in public.

For weeks, officials had stuck to the line that there was "no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission," calling the disease "preventable and controllable." But during the teleconference, Ma said that "clustered cases suggest human-to-human transmission is possible."

"The epidemic situation is still severe and complex, the most severe challenge since SARS in 2003, and is likely to develop into a major public health event," the

memo cites Ma as saying.

After the teleconference, officials adjusted their language slightly, but continued to downplay the threat.

"We have reached the latest understanding that the risk of sustained human-to-human transmission is low," Li Qun, the head of China CDC's emergency center, told Chinese state television on Jan. 15.

PANDEMIC PREPARATIONS

Before the teleconference, health authorities had focused narrowly on Wuhan, the central China city where the outbreak started.

They searched for visitors to a market that dealt in live game, believing the virus was largely transmitted from animals to humans. But rattled by the case in Thailand, Chinese leaders launched a nationwide hunt to find cases, the documents show.

AP PHOTO





MEDICAL INTELLIGENCE SLEUTHS TRACKED, WARNED OF NEW VIRUS

DEB RIECHMANN,
WASHINGTON

IN late February when President Donald Trump was urging Americans not to panic over the novel coronavirus, alarms were sounding at a little-known intelligence unit situated on a U.S. Army base an hour's drive north of Washington.

Intelligence, science and medical professionals at the National Center for Medical Intelligence were quietly doing what they have done for decades — monitoring and tracking global health threats that could endanger U.S. troops abroad and Americans at home.

On Feb. 25, the medical intelligence unit raised its warning that the coronavirus would become a pandemic within 30 days from WATCHCON 2 — a probable crisis — to WATCHCON 1 — an imminent one, according to a U.S. official. That was 15 days before the World Health Organization declared the rapidly spreading coronavirus outbreak a global pandemic.

At the time of the warning, few coronavirus infections had been reported in the United States. That same day, Trump, who was in New Delhi, India, tweeted: "The Coronavirus is very much under control in the USA." Soon, however, the coronavirus spread across the world, sickening more than 2 million people with the disease COVID-19 and killing more than 26,000 people in the United States.

The center's work typically is shared with defense and health officials, including the secretary of health and human services. Its Feb. 25 warning, first reported last month by Newsweek, was included in an intelligence briefing provided to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but it's unknown whether Trump or other White House officials saw it. Various intelligence agencies had been including information about the coronavirus in briefing materials since early January, according to the official, who spoke only on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to confirm details about the alert.

At least 100 epidemiologists, virologists, chemical engineers, toxicologists, biologists and military medical expert — all schooled in intelligence trade craft — work at the medical intelligence unit, located at Fort Detrick in Frederick, Maryland. Requests to interview current workers were denied, but former employees described how they go through massive amounts of information, looking for clues about global health events.

"You feel like you're looking for needles in a stack of needles," said Denis Kaufman, who worked in the medical intelligence unit from 1990 to 2005 and again later before retiring.

Most of the information they study is public, called "open source" material. A local newspaper in Africa might publish a story about an increasing number of people getting sick, and that raises a flag because there's no mention of any such illness on the other side of the country. A doctor in the Middle East might post concerns about a virus on social media. But unlike organizations such as the WHO, the medical intelligence team, part of the Defense Intelligence Agency, also has access to classified intelligence collected by the 17 U.S. spy agencies.

The medical unit can dig into signals intelligence and intercepts of communications collected by the National Security Agency. It can read information that CIA officers pick up in the field overseas. The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency can share satellite imagery and terrain maps to help assess how a disease, like Ebola or avian flu, might spread through a population.

"Every day, all of us would come into work and read and research our area for anything that's different — anything that doesn't make sense, whether it's about disease, health care, earthquakes, national disaster — anything that would affect the health of a nation," said Martha "Rainie" Dasche, a specialist on Africa who retired from the DIA in 2018. "We start wondering. We

look at things with a jaundiced eye."

They don't collect intelligence. They analyze it and produce medical intelligence assessments, forecasts and databases on infectious disease and health risks from natural disasters, toxic materials, bioterrorism as well as certain countries' capacity to handle them. Their reports are written for military commanders, defense health officials and researchers as well as policymakers at the Defense Department, White House and federal agencies, especially the Department of Health and Human Services.

The center was originally in the U.S. Army Surgeon General's office during World War II, but military leaders throughout history have learned the hard way about the danger that disease poses to troops.

"In the Spanish-American War, there were major epidemics of typhoid fever and dysentery," according to a report written in 1951 at Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston in Texas. "World War I saw widespread outbreaks of influenza and malaria. In World War II, there was a high incidence of malaria and infectious hepatitis. ... In all wars prior to World War II, losses from disease exceeded losses from battle injury."

Today, the team's success comes in providing early warnings that prevent illness. That can be difficult if a country doesn't report or share information out of fear that the news will affect its economy or tourism. Some undeveloped countries with poor health systems might not compile good data. Information from countries trying to play down the seriousness of an epidemic can't be trusted.

Kaufman said massive amounts of information come out of China, where the first reports of the new coronavirus surfaced in the city of Wuhan. But because the country is run by an authoritarian government, the medical intelligence researchers glean information from the local level, not Beijing. **AP**

'EMPHASIZE POLITICS'

The documents show how political considerations may have shaped China's response to the outbreak.

In the memo, Ma demanded officials unite around Xi. It made clear that social stability was a key priority during the long lead-up to China's two biggest political meetings of the year in March.

"Emphasize politics, emphasize discipline, emphasize science," the memo cites Ma as saying.

While the documents do not spell out why Chinese leaders waited six days to make their concerns public, the meetings may be one reason. They were later indefinitely postponed.

The memo said the health commission was acting in accordance with "important instructions" from Xi and other top officials. It referred to a Jan. 7 meeting chaired by the vice premier in charge of public health and attended by Xi. But it did not make explicit what those instructions were.

REWRITING HISTORY

By late January, boiling public anger over China's initial handling of the ou-

tbreak put the leadership on the defensive. Health experts accused Wuhan's leaders of a cover-up, and Beijing fired local officials.

National leaders began to publicize directives they had earlier made in secret in apparent attempts to demonstrate they had acted decisively from the beginning. On Feb. 17, President Xi revealed he had led the response as early as Jan. 7, two weeks before his first public comment on the virus. Days later, the National Health Commission published a notice revealing its confidential teleconference, dated to Jan. 14.

The public notice omitted sections of the internal memo showing how alarmed officials had been at the time. It added lines suggesting that commission leaders were responding proactively to what then seemed a minor outbreak.

"Respond to small probability events with high probability thinking," the altered notice read. "Seek truth from facts, and propagate scientific knowledge on epidemic prevention to avoid causing panic among the masses." **AP**

Response

The memo warned the risk of transmission was higher with many people traveling for the upcoming Lunar New Year holiday. "All localities must prepare for and respond to a pandemic," it said.

Officials distributed test kits and ordered health officials across the country to screen patients. They ordered hospitals to open fever clinics, and doctors and nurses to don protective gear. They instructed officials in Hubei province, where Wuhan is located, to begin temperature checks at transportation hubs and cut down on large public gatherings.

They did it all without telling the public. Even as the new measures began to turn up hundreds of cases across the country, tens of thousands of people dined at a mass Lunar New Year banquet and millions traveled through Wuhan.

Africa to roll out more than one million coronavirus tests



Pallbearers wearing full PPE suits lift the casket containing the remains of Benedict Somi Vilakasi for his burial ceremony at the Nasrec Memorial Park outside Johannesburg yesterday

CARA ANNA,
JOHANNESBURG

MORE than 1 million coronavirus tests will be rolled out starting next week in Africa to address the “big gap” in assessing the true number of cases on the continent, the head of the African Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said yesterday, while one projection estimates more than 10 million severe cases of the virus in the next six months.

“Maybe 15 million tests” will be required in Africa over the next three months, John Nkengasong said.

The new initiative to dramatically accelerate testing comes as the continent of 1.3 billion people braces for its turn in the pandemic that has rolled from China to Europe and the U.S. and now beyond. Experts have said Africa is weeks behind Europe and the U.S. but the rise in cases has looked alarmingly similar.

Africa has suffered in the global race to obtain testing kits and other badly needed medical equipment. While the number of virus cases across the continent was above 17,000 yesterday, health officials have said the testing shortage means more are out there.

South Africa, the most assertive African nation in testing, has carried out

90,000 tests so far, according to its health ministry.

One projection over the next six months shows more than 10 million severe cases of the virus, Michel Yao, the World Health Organization’s emergency operations manager in Africa, told a separate briefing. “But these are still to be fine-tuned,” he said, and public health measures could have an impact. The West Africa Ebola outbreak in 2014-16 never reached the “alarming numbers” projected, he said.

The Africa CDC chief expressed concern for the U.S. decision to cut funding for the WHO, saying it “absolutely will affect (African Union) member states’ ability to receive support” from the U.N. agency. The U.S. is the top donor to the WHO, but President Donald Trump has complained about alleged mismanagement, to widespread objections.

The WHO’s regional chief for Africa, Matshidiso Moeti, said that for the current biennium, or two years, the region has received almost \$50 million from the U.S.

Of the U.S. decision, she said the impact will be significant in fighting diseases beyond the coronavirus

including malaria and HIV and “we are very much hoping it will be rethought.” Overall, the WHO’s 47-country sub-Saharan Africa region will need about \$300 million over the next six months to support what the countries are doing to combat the virus, she said.

Any reduction in support for African nations will be painful as the con-

Africa suffered in the global race to obtain testing kits and other badly needed medical equipment. The number of virus cases across the continent is above 17,000

continent has some of the world’s weakest health systems.

Ten African nations have no ventilators at all to treat virus patients who need respiratory support, the Africa CDC chief said, but arrangements are being made to deliver some recently donated by the Jack Ma Foundation. Nkengasong did not name the 10 countries.

He again called for solidarity inside and outside Africa in combating the virus, saying that “COVID-19 will not be defeated anywhere on the con-

continent until it is defeated everywhere on the continent.”

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild to moderate symptoms such as fever and cough. But for some, especially older adults and those with other health problems, it can cause pneumonia and death.

Millions of low-income people across Africa are struggling as countries begin to extend weeks-long lockdowns to slow the virus’ spread. Nkengasong acknowledged the economic pain the lockdowns and other measures create but said “the long-term gains are incomparable” for the continent.

“We find ourselves between a hard place and a rock” in balancing the health and economic needs, he said.

He also made a point of addressing one widespread concern — the alleged abuse of lockdown powers by some countries’ security forces. Human rights groups have said police in some cases have beaten, even killed, people accused of defying lockdowns or curfews.

“Security forces should be trained in non-violent methods in controlling the population,” Nkengasong said. AP

this day in history



1961 EXILES INVADE CUBA AT BAY OF PIGS

Reports from Cuba say the island has been invaded by counter-revolutionary forces trying to overthrow the country’s leader, Fidel Castro.

The only news coming out of Cuba is broadcast by the government-run radio station. All other communications with the island have been cut.

The first landing is reported to have taken place in the early hours of this morning.

Broadcasts from Cuban government radio appealing for medical help indicate that the raiders have successfully penetrated 25 miles (40km) inland.

They appear to have come ashore on an area of the coast known as the Bahía de Cochinos, or Bay of Pigs, south-east of the capital, Havana.

There is no indication as to the size of the invasion force, but Dr Castro, in a speech on Cuban government radio, said they are supported by aircraft and warships.

“The glorious soldiers of the revolutionary army and the national militia are battling the enemy at all the points where they have landed,” he said.

The Cuban military have been on high alert for an imminent invasion for some days.

In a speech yesterday, Fidel Castro told the Cuban people he intended to resist such an attack with “an iron hand”.

Cuban exiles based in the United States, who are organising the attempt to overthrow the Castro regime, say thousands of Cubans have joined the rebel forces.

However, there is no independent confirmation of the level of support for the invasion from within Cuba.

The leader of the Cuban exile movement in the US, Dr Miro Cardona, said the battle had begun “to liberate our homeland from the despotic rule of Fidel Castro”.

Dr Cardona played a part in Fidel Castro’s revolution against the dictatorship of President Batista in 1959, and was prime minister for 45 days before Dr Castro himself took over.

In a statement in Washington, the US Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, has again denied US involvement in the invasion of Cuba.

He said the United States had not, and would not intervene in Cuba, with armed forces or otherwise.

Strong suspicions that the United States is sponsoring an offensive against the Castro government have been fuelled by the bombing of three of Cuba’s military air bases two days ago.

The US denied all knowledge of the episode, saying Cuban Air Force pilots defecting to Florida were responsible.

But reporters who watched one of the planes land in Miami after carrying out the attack described features which indicated it was American-made.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The invasion of Cuba was carried out by a force of about 1,400 exiled Cubans, with American support from the sea and air.

The main landing point at the Bay of Pigs was a beach surrounded by a mosquito-infested swamp.

The only way to get further in to the island was along just three heavily-defended roads.

The fighting lasted just three days. The invasion force was badly outnumbered and the mass defection of Cubans they had hoped for — their only realistic hope of success — never materialised.

More than 100 of the invasion force died in the attack, and 1,189 were taken prisoner.

Shortly afterwards, President Kennedy acknowledged US support for the invaders.

It was the worst foreign policy embarrassment of his career.

The Bay of Pigs debacle not only strengthened Fidel Castro’s hold on power, but also brought the Soviet Union firmly on to his side.

It acted as a key catalyst for the Cuban missile crisis 18 months later, on 28 October 1962, which brought the world to the brink of nuclear war.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Don't change how you express yourself out of fear that you'll trigger a bad response. Like it or not, there is no point in saying anything unless you say the truth. You'll never be able to make real progress any other way.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Be careful of others who say that you're wasting your time. They don't know what you know, which is that the more energy you put into something, the bigger the reward you'll get out of it.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

You're finally starting to connect with someone new on a much deeper level. This could be the start of something very exciting. Today, you have to do all you can to build on that momentum!



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

What they need you to do is a nearly effortless task for you, but for them it could be almost insurmountable. In exchange for your service, you'll receive a wonderful sense of usefulness, as well as sincere gratitude.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

No one wants to try to cheer someone up. They'd rather just join in on the good time with the person who's smiling the brightest smile. Keep that in mind when you're talking to new people.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Are you trying to decide whether or not to reschedule a family event or obligation? Your family is important, but you know that it can cause you equal amounts of angst and joy.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Balancing your desires with the desires of important people in your life is a nearly impossible task. When push comes to shove, you have to put yourself first. Who knows?



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

You've seen enough fake people in your day to know one when you see one, so when someone brags about things that sound too good to be true, trust your instincts.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

A lot more attention could be paid to you from a multitude of different sources today. Are you ready for it? When compliments come flooding your way, you need to play it cool and be gracious.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

A new person in your life could be looking at you with a great deal of appreciation in their eyes, and there is a strong undercurrent of positive energy whenever you talk to them.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Before you lose all sense of your own identity (or worse - that new cutie doesn't know who you really are), disengage a bit from the group and make your own mark on the world today.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

The fact is, you don't need to impress someone whose views on the world and life are so narrow. Only concern yourself with how the people you respect feel.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY					EASY+				
4	2	3			3	9		8	
		8		4 9 6			7 4 1		
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6	9 2		1			5 1 6			
			1	6 8			5		2 1

MEDIUM					HARD				
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1								4 5	
5			4	6					
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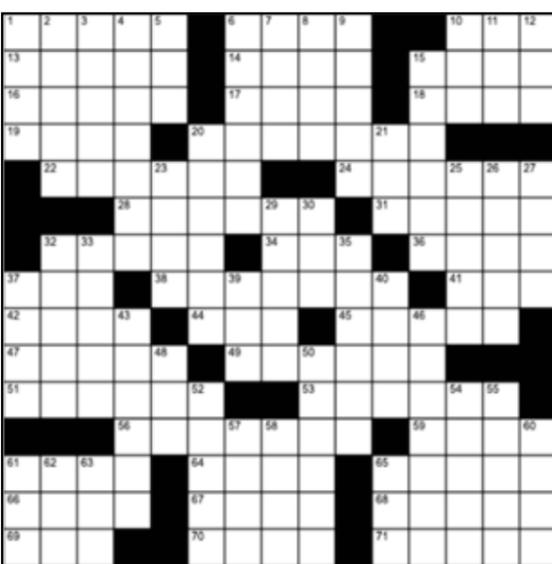
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	11	22	blowing dust
Harbin	3	16	cloudy
Tianjin	9	19	drizzle
Urumqi	9	17	drizzle
Xi'an	12	25	clear
Lhasa	3	15	overcast
Chengdu	16	28	overcast
Chongqing	19	29	cloudy
Kunming	10	28	clear
Nanjing	15	29	cloudy
Shanghai	16	27	overcast
Wuhan	15	29	cloudy
Hangzhou	12	29	cloudy
Taipei	16	24	cloudy
Guangzhou	16	27	cloudy
Hong Kong	20	27	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	1	8	drizzle
Frankfurt	0	8	cloudy
Paris	2	10	clear
London	5	13	cloudy
New York	3	10	cloudy

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS: 1- Poles for sails; 6- Fragments; 10- Car club; 13- Vow locale; 14- Bibliography abbr.; 15- Bhutan's continent; 16- Ornamental coronet; 17- Taylor of "Mystic Pizza"; 18- Jamaican exports; 19- Sharp to the taste; 20- Genuine; 22- Medium setting?; 24- Raved; 28- Joint; 31- Fencing move; 32- Body of salt water; 34- Tear; 36- Fit to be tried; 37- Reporter's question; 38- Capable of being ridden; 41- Ed.'s pile; 42- Head light?; 44- Barracks bed; 45- Crackerjack; 47- One of Chekhov's "Three Sisters"; 49- Overeats; 51- Swiss city; 53- Weights; 56- Tangible; 59- God of war; 61- Soared; 64- Blab; 65- Suppose; 66- Director Premier; 67- French friend; 68- Furnishings; 69- Nutritional std.; 70- Box; 71- Sings;

DOWN: 1- Damon of "Good Will Hunting"; 2- Rap sheet info; 3- Gaze fixedly; 4- Steak ___; 5- Mme., across the Pyrenees; 6- Conviction; 7- Pack ___ (quit); 8- Bath powder; 9- More cunning; 10- Tempe sch.; 11- Direct a gun; 12- Small batteries; 15- Places of contest; 20- Attractive route; 21- Blame; 23- At hand; 25- Chaplin persona; 26- Dadaist Max; 27- Turns red, say; 29- One of the Muses; 30- Curved bone; 32- Midway alternative; 33- General Powell; 35- Pestilence; 37- Tory rival; 39- Man's best friend; 40- Biblical garden; 43- Ring combo; 46- One on the run; 48- Actress Gardner; 50- Wheel; 52- Take the role of; 54- "All My Children" vixen; 55- Spanish Mister; 57- Office fill-in; 58- Hip bones; 60- Sun. speeches; 61- In favor of; 62- Old Ford; 63- JFK posting; 65- Takes too much;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- Emergency calls 999
- Fire department 28 572 222
- PJ (Open line) 993
- PJ (Picket) 28 557 775
- PSP 28 573 333
- Customs 28 559 944
- S. J. Hospital 28 313 731
- Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333
- Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300
- IAM 28 387 333
- Tourism 28 333 000
- Airport 59 888 88
- Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
- Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
- Telephone - Report 1000
- Electricity - Report 28 339 922
- Macau Daily Times 28 716 081



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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

DRIVE IN

A sober diplomacy drama in 'Sergio'

LINDSEY BAHR,
AP FILM WRITER

THE United Nations diplomat Sérgio Vieira de Mello has been described as a cross between James Bond and Bobby Kennedy, which sounds like a compelling enough pitch for a film on its own.

The Brazilian-born de Mello spent 34 years at the U.N. during which he was involved in clearing land mines in Cambodia, leading East Timor to independence from Indonesia and serving as a U.N. Special Representative in Iraq in 2003 at the time of the Canal Hotel bombing. He was even considered a likely successor to Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

But you'd be forgiven for drawing a blank at the mention of his name. Filmmaker Greg Barker even called him "the most important guy you've never heard of." His fascination with the charismatic diplomat has spanned more than a decade and been the subject of two films: A short documentary and a fictionalized feature-length drama starring Wagner Moura and Ana de Armas that hits Netflix Friday.

"Sergio" the feature is a hand-



Wagner Moura (center) and Ana de Armas in a scene from "Sergio"

some-looking, serious and solidly adult geopolitical drama that neither talks down to uninformed viewers nor requires a master's degree to understand. It begins intriguingly enough, as de Mello (Moura) arrives in Baghdad and immediately starts clashing with the United States' Paul Bremer (Bradley Whitford) over objectives.

De Mello empathizes with the Iraqis and wonders how he would feel seeing foreign troops on the streets of his hometown of Rio de Janeiro (not good). Bremer, however, believes that the U.N. is there at the pleasure of the U.S., talking about liberation and independence while doing what appears to be the exact opposite.

But de Mello is no shrinking

violet and knows that he's there as an independent entity and isn't afraid to say so to the press. It's all rather exciting, although the 20-20 hindsight feels a little oversimplified. The escalation continues and de Mello has decided to expose all the human rights violations of the U.S. to the security council when things come to a sudden halt: A bomb goes off

and he wakes up pinned under a pile of rubble.

The script, from "Dallas Buyers Club" co-writer Craig Borten, tells the story from there as a series of flashbacks to his time in East Timor, a pivotal moment in his career and life when he meets de Armas' Carolina Larriera, interspersed with the aftermath of the Baghdad bombing as soldiers scramble to save de Mello and refugee expert Gil Loescher (Brian E O'Byrne).

There's a natural engine to the narrative and the movie star charisma of de Armas and Moura, along with their palpable chemistry, helps drive interest for a while.

But you're always waiting for the movie to really get going.

The situation in Baghdad, even before the bombing, could have provided more than enough drama to sustain a feature. But "Sergio" wants to be more sweeping than that — romantic, dramatic and political — and we're left with something that never exactly reaches the full promise of "James Bond meets Bobby Kennedy."

It's not that "Sergio" is bad — far from it — but it's not necessarily going to keep you glued to the screen either.

"Sergio," a Netflix release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for "language, some bloody images and a scene of sexuality." Running time: 118 minutes. ★★☆☆

AD

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18h30 - 21h30

inicio/starts: 20/04/2020 propina/fee: MOP 630 *

fim/finishes: 11/05/2020

língua/language: Português e Inglês/Portuguese and English **

total: 21 horas/hours
07 sessões/sessions

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OPINION

World Views

Ellen Wright Clayton, Vanderbilt University, The Conversation

CORONAVIRUS MAY WANE THIS SUMMER, BUT SEASONAL VARIATION WON'T END PANDEMIC

Will SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, fade away on its own this summer?

After all, other viruses – including influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), which causes bronchiolitis in little children – are mostly seen in the winter.

The National Academies' Standing Committee on Emerging Infectious Diseases and 21st Century Health Threats recently addressed the question of whether SARS-CoV-2 will follow the same pattern. The group of experts corralled the research that's been done so far – much of it not yet peer-reviewed – to assess the evidence.

While there is some reason to hope that things may get better as the weather warms up, there is plenty of reason for the U.S. to keep its guard up.

Are heat and humidity reason for hope?

Although the U.S. is early in the course of the pandemic, there is evidence from other countries that SARS-CoV-2 spreads more rapidly in cold, dry weather.

One preprint study of 30 Chinese provinces showed that the number of COVID-19 cases went down by between 36% and 57% for every 1.8 degree Fahrenheit increase in temperature. When temperatures held steady in the low 40s F, the number of cases went down between 11% and 22% with each 1% increase in relative humidity (how much water is in the air).

A larger preprint study looking at 310 regions in 116 countries found that 11% more cases were reported when the temperature went down 9 degrees, the relative humidity went down 10% and when the wind speed went up.

Laboratory research also suggest that the virus survives longer in cold conditions. One study showed that SARS-CoV-2 lasts for 14 days at 40 F in lab media but is gone after one day at 98.6 F.

These and other studies suggest that warm, humid weather may slow the spread of this virus, although not all commentators agree.

New research on this topic appears almost daily, and scientists are watching to see what happens as summer comes to the Northern Hemisphere.

Which clues call for caution?

COVID-19 is already spreading in many parts of the world where it's hot, including Australia and South America, demonstrating that high temperatures are not enough to stop the disease.

The most important reason to be concerned about ongoing spread is the fact that this is a brand new virus for humans, so almost everyone is susceptible to being infected.

In fact, weather actually appears to play a minor role in the rate at which this virus spreads.

Other influences on infection rates include individual behaviors, cultural practices, geography, income and living conditions. Public health practices such as social distancing, the intensity of testing for infection, contact tracing, quarantine of people who are exposed and isolation of people who are actually infected also play a big role in how the coronavirus spreads.

Until there's a vaccine, prevention will require avoiding exposure to people who can spread the virus. Communities need to test people to find out who is contagious and engage in serious contact tracing, quarantine and isolation. Scientists need to learn more about how to determine if someone is immune and how long immunity lasts, a big open question at the moment. As individuals, each of us will need to follow expert scientific advice about good hygiene practices and distancing.

SARS-CoV-2 is likely to keep circulating until the human population has widespread immunity, which hopefully will come not from an unchecked pandemic but from developing and deploying a safe and effective vaccine. [Abridged]

China is denying allegations that the coronavirus pandemic may have originated in a laboratory near the city of Wuhan where contagious samples were being stored.

Foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian cited the head of the World Health Organization and other unidentified medical experts as saying there is no evidence that transmission began from the lab. "We always believe that this is a scientific issue and requires the professional assessment of scientists and medical experts," Zhao said at a daily briefing yesterday.

China also has strongly denied that it delayed announcing the virus outbreak in Wuhan and under-reported case numbers, worsening the impact on the U.S. and other countries.

The virus is widely believed to have originated with bats and to have passed via another species to humans at a wildlife and seafood market in Wuhan, although a firm determination has yet to be made. Allegations of a leak of the virus from the lab have been made in U.S. media. (See p6-7)

ONE GOOD THING

TO LOVE AND TO CHERISH: NURSE COUPLE UNITES TO FIGHT VIRUS



Nurses Mindy Brock and Ben Cayer, wearing protective equipment, hold each other and look into each other's eyes, in Tampa General Hospital in Tampa, Florida

CARLA K. JOHNSON, AP MEDICAL WRITER

BETWEEN surgeries one stressful morning, Ben Cayer and Mindy Brock — husband and wife, and fellow nurse anesthetists — peered through layers of protective gear, and locked eyes.

It was a lovers' gaze in the most unlikely situation. A co-worker was there to snap a picture.

Now the image, shared on social media, is inspiring people around the globe.

"Everybody's talking about the photo," says Cayer, 46. It strikes a chord "because we're all going through the same thing right now and it's a symbol of hope and love."

Brock, 38, adds: "What's important is that we stick together, we work together, and we always support each other. And not just Ben and I, but the human race right now."

The Florida pair share a home, a profession and, now, a mission — shouldering the high-risk duty of placing breathing tubes in surgery patients, any of whom may have COVID-19.

They didn't think twice about volunteering for Tampa General Hospital's

new "airway team," Cayer says.

Placing a tube into a patient's mouth and down into their airway requires close contact — and because the virus spreads in droplets, the highest level of protective gear. To conserve gear and expose fewer health care workers, the hospital pared down staff to a minimum for intubations before surgery.

They met in nurse anesthesia school in 2007. In classes, they sat in alphabetical order

Their patients have been in car crashes, or needed brain surgery because of a ruptured blood vessel. As is the case at many U.S. hospitals, only emergency surgeries continue at the Tampa hospital, to make room as the pandemic continues to crest.

They met in nurse anesthesia school in 2007. In classes, they sat in alphabetical order. Brock next to Cayer, she says, "and it just took off from there."

They married five years ago and now work for TeamHealth, a medi-

cal staffing firm. But on the morning of the photo, they bickered during the drive to work. They disagreed about what to play on the car radio, and who was doing the dishes at home.

The new COVID-19 procedures — it was Brock's first day on the new team — were making them both tense.

"We were arguing," she says. Later, they found each other between surgeries. The tension melted. "All those trivial things that we were arguing about that morning, in the grand scheme of things, aren't that important." The photo captures that moment.

He says they don't worry much about getting sick, although the virus has come close. Brock's mother has recovered from it. Co-workers fear catching it. Patients feel alone because visitors have been strictly limited.

"We have grown men bawling because none of their family can be there with them," Brock says.

It helps to be married to another nurse, because "unless you're here doing this, there's no way to describe it," she says. "He gets it." AP



Singapore Foreign workers in Singapore who live in crowded dormitories now account for half of the city-state's virus cases after new infections spiked for a third day. The number of infections has jumped by 1,167 since Monday. While successfully managing its first wave of infections, Singapore overlooked its vast population of foreign workers who live in dormitories that typically house up to 20 men sharing kitchens, toilets and other facilities. The 447 new coronavirus cases yesterday raised Singapore's total to 3,699, with 10 deaths.

Australia Australian foreign minister said she agrees with the U.S. that the World Health Organization needs to be reviewed, but Australia continues to support the agency's valuable work in the Pacific. Foreign Minister Marise Payne told Seven Network television: "We share some of the concerns of the United States and I do think there are areas of the operation of WHO that absolutely require review."



New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern began outlining how New Zealand's lockdown might be eased starting next Wednesday. Primary schools would reopen, but attendance would be voluntary. Some businesses could reopen, including drive-through and delivery restaurants. Retail stores would remain closed and large gatherings would still be banned. Lawmakers will decide Monday whether to proceed with the easing. New Zealand reported 15 new cases, a number that has dropped significantly.

Philippines A majority of senators demanded the resignation of Health Secretary Francisco Duque III for what they say is his leadership failure that led to a mishandling of the pandemic. They say it endangers the lives of health workers and the Filipino people. President Duterte (pictured) rejected the senators' call but said he wants Duque to work harder. The Philippines has the most infections in Southeast Asia with 5,660 cases, including 362 deaths.