

Advance preparations and early response to COVID-19 pandemic

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Taiwan has won global acclaim for the many advance measures it has taken in response to the outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). These measures are widely regarded as critical to Taiwan's success in preventing and containing the spread of the epidemic. Taiwan's attitude and approach underpinning these efforts have been influenced by a myriad of historical factors. One factor that particularly stands out was a remark made by former Chinese representative to the World Health Organization Sha Zukang on Taiwan's exclusion from the organization, "Who cares about you (Taiwanese)?" This comment reinforced Taiwan's commitment to becoming self-reliant. The tragic outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003 served as another important lesson, one that made Taiwan distrustful of information emanating from China. All of these factors led Taiwan to take early measures against COVID-19. Indeed, an official from the Taiwan Centers for Disease Control (Taiwan CDC) was quoted by the media as saying that "Taiwan has been preparing for this day for 17 years."

Key aspects of Taiwan's advance efforts are discussed below:

1. Epidemiological surveys and border control

At the end of December 2019, the Taiwan CDC learned from online sources that at least seven cases of atypical pneumonia had occurred in the Chinese city of Wuhan. (Note: China commonly refers to SARS, which erupted in 2003, as atypical pneumonia; SARS was a serious disease that was also caused by a coronavirus and could be transmitted

from human to human.) Because of its experience with SARS, Taiwan was very vigilant with regard to the new outbreak. On December 31, Taiwan sent an email to the WHO contact window under the International Health Regulations (IHR) mechanism to request further information from WHO. In addition, the email discreetly referred to the disease as atypical pneumonia and noted that patients had been isolated for treatment. From these statements, public health professionals should have been able to deduce that there was a strong possibility of human-to-human transmission with this new disease.

Even though the Taiwan government was unable to gain clarification through existing channels, it promptly activated border quarantine measures on December 31 on the assumption that there was a real possibility of human-to-human transmission. In fact, Taiwan was the first country in the world to conduct onboard screening of passengers arriving on direct flights from Wuhan and to require arriving travelers to fill in a health declaration.

On January 6, 2020, the Taiwan CDC sent a letter to China requesting permission to dispatch experts on a fact-finding visit to Wuhan. While awaiting China's response, Taiwan tightened border controls. Travelers arriving on international flights and via the mini three links (direct transport between Taiwan's Matsu and Kinmen islands and China) were required to provide details on their recent travel history. On January 15, Taiwan listed this new form of pneumonia as a category 5 notifiable communicable disease, a full seven days earlier than China, where the disease originated.

After China gave permission, Taiwan's experts traveled to Wuhan on January 12 to gain a better understanding of the status of the outbreak, prevention and control measures adopted there, and patients' exposure history. Based on preliminary findings, they determined that human-to-human transmission was in fact occurring. They returned to Taiwan on January 15, and a day later, the Taiwan CDC raised the travel notice for Wuhan to Level 2: Alert. However, WHO did not send a delegation of experts to China until mid-February. During their trip, the WHO experts visited Beijing, Sichuan, and Guangdong but not Wuhan and other severely affected areas of Hubei Province.

At a time when the world did not yet have a clear picture about the outbreak in China, Taiwan was already stepping up border control measures.

1.1. Phase 1 border control: preventing spread of COVID-19 from China

From commencing the screening of passengers arriving on direct flights from Wuhan on December 31, 2019, to imposing an entry ban on residents of China (incl. Hong Kong and Macao) on February 11, 2020

During this first phase, Taiwan gradually raised travel notices for affected areas of China (incl. Hong Kong and Macao) in accordance with the severity of their respective outbreaks. Entry was prohibited for residents of Hubei Province on January 26, followed later by a complete entry ban. Meanwhile, WHO only classified the outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on January 30, and urged countries not to impose travel and trade restrictions on China. Taiwan acted early in implementing border control measures and banning the

entry of residents of China (incl. Hong Kong and Macao), promptly and effectively preventing the spread of COVID-19 from China into Taiwan.

1.2. Phase 2 border control: preventing spread of COVID-19 from other countries

From issuing and raising travel notices for other countries starting February 11 to imposing a transit ban on foreign nationals on March 24

Taiwan issued travel notices and raised the advisory level for individual countries in accordance with the severity of their respective COVID-19 outbreaks. There are three levels of travel notices. Travelers arriving from countries listed under travel notice Level 1: Watch, or Level 2: Alert, were required to conduct self-health management for 14 days, and those from countries under Level 3: Warning were required to observe home quarantine for 14 days. Following the global spread of the pandemic in mid-February, Taiwan raised travel notices for all countries to Level 3 on March 21. Two days earlier, on March 19, an entry ban was imposed on foreign nationals (exempting those holding a valid Resident Certificate or special entry permit). And on March 24, foreign travelers were also barred from transiting at airports in Taiwan. This comprehensive entry and transit ban remains in place.

Considering that countries around the world had closed their borders to prevent the spread of the pandemic, the Bureau of Consular Affairs announced that all travelers who entered Taiwan on or before March 21, 2020, on a visitor visa or landing visa or through a visa-waiver program and who had not exceeded their duration of stay would be granted an automatic 30-day extension of their duration of stay. A second automatic 30-day extension was announced on April 17.

Meanwhile, in order to prevent foreign nationals who have exceeded their visa's duration of stay from becoming a weak link in disease control efforts, the National Immigration Agency introduced the Expanded Overstayers Voluntary Departure Program. Overstayers (including missing migrant workers) who turn themselves in between March 20 and June 30 will be eligible for penalty relief measures: they will be neither detained nor given an entry ban, and will be given only a minimum fine. The NIA will also help them return to their home country as soon as possible.

Note: Please refer to the appendix for details on the two phases of border control measures.

2. Effective monitoring, testing, tracing, and investigation mechanisms

Given the lack of clarity concerning the COVID-19 outbreak in China, the approach of the Lunar New Year holiday, and close interactions between people across the Taiwan Strait, the Taiwan CDC started conducting temperature checks on passengers arriving on direct flights from Wuhan prior to disembarkation on December 31, 2019. Then, on January 8, 2020, enhanced measures were implemented at all ports of entry, including Kinmen and Matsu. Travelers arriving with a fever were asked if they had recently traveled to Wuhan.

China reported on January 9 that laboratory tests identified a novel coronavirus as the pathogen causing the disease, and announced the genetic sequence of the virus on January 11. The Taiwan CDC promptly developed a rapid nucleic acid diagnostic method based on this sequence and activated a mechanism for suspected cases to be reported and tested.

As the number of confirmed cases in China rose rapidly, the Taiwan CDC on January 15 classified the disease as a category 5 notifiable communicable disease. Comprehensive prevention and containment measures were implemented covering the reporting of cases, testing, isolation ward treatment, epidemiological surveys, self-health management, and health monitoring of contacts.

On January 19, the reporting mechanism was expanded to also incorporate suspected cases of Type A influenza and pneumonia of unknown cause. Medical facilities were required to conduct detailed inquiries about patients' travel history, occupation, contact history, and cluster information; promptly report cases; and collect specimens for testing.

On January 20, monitoring was expanded further. People suffering from pneumonia and with a travel history to any part of China also had to be reported. However, on January 23, WHO claimed that the COVID-19 outbreak did not yet constitute a global health emergency and there was no evidence of human-to-human transmission outside China. On February 16, community monitoring was activated in Taiwan. Cases that met the following criteria were tested: those who had an overseas travel history within the past 14 days or had contact with somebody who had recently returned from overseas and suffered from fever or respiratory symptoms that doctors strongly suspected were caused by COVID-19; those associated with an infection cluster and who experienced fever and respiratory symptoms; and pneumonia cases who showed no improvement after three days of antibiotic treatment and for whom no

cause of the disease could be identified, who were linked to a cluster, or who were medical personnel.

3. Triage measures for mild and severe cases

The rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic led to the early collapse of medical systems in many countries, due mainly to a failure to appropriately allocate medical resources and prevent nosocomial infections.

After its experience with the SARS epidemic, Taiwan has had a comprehensive body temperature screening mechanism in place for many years. When reports emerged of a new outbreak in China, hospitals in Taiwan activated temperature checks and designated in-hospital routes for patients and personnel. Starting January 27, medical facilities made masks mandatory for people entering their premises, limited the number of people allowed to accompany a patient, and banned visits to inpatients, in order to minimize the risk of nosocomial infection.

On March 12, the Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC), which was activated on January 20 to coordinate efforts to fight the disease, designated 167 medical facilities for virus testing and 50 for care of severe cases. This arrangement for community hospitals and major medical centers to share the workload of providing test services effectively distributed patients and ensured the stability of Taiwan's medical system.

4. Conclusion

The early months of 2020 have indisputably been the most challenging time for the international community for a century. Owing to China's

concealment of the truth and delayed reporting of cases to WHO, as well as WHO's widely criticized lack of professionalism and neutrality in dealing with the outbreak, COVID-19 evolved into a global pandemic. Many countries were unprepared as the virus spread, leading to widespread infection and a large death toll. Taiwan, meanwhile, having learned from the SARS outbreak, increased its vigilance and made advance preparations, introducing a wide array of disease prevention measures and steadily enhancing its policies, thereby winning international affirmation. However, in what will be a prolonged battle against COVID-19, Taiwan cannot afford to relax.

The government and people of Taiwan will continue to adjust their strategy according to the pandemic's development. The government will not be constrained by existing systems, and welcomes views from civil society. Such unique institutional flexibility allows for the gradual shaping of a collective awareness and approach toward disease prevention.

【Appendix】

Phase 1 border control: preventing spread from China ¹		
Outbreak developments and measures adopted in other countries	Date	Measures adopted in Taiwan * Entry ban on travelers from affected areas does not apply to R.O.C. nationals and foreigners holding valid Resident Certificate.
<p>➤ China notifies WHO that pneumonia cases of unknown cause have been detected in Wuhan, but claims that there is no evidence of significant human-to-human transmission.</p>	<p>12/31 12/31</p>	<p>➤ The Taiwan CDC activates border quarantine measures, screening passengers on direct flights from Wuhan, Hubei Province, prior to disembarkation and requiring arriving travelers to fill in a health declaration form.</p>
	<p>1/8</p>	<p>➤ Passengers arriving on international flights and via the mini three links (between Taiwan's Kinmen and Matsu islands and China) are required to provide details on their travel history.</p>
	<p>1/15</p>	<p>➤ The disease is listed as a category 5 notifiable communicable disease.</p>
<p>➤ Thailand reports its first confirmed case, which is also the first confirmed case outside China; the patient, a Chinese national, arrived from Wuhan.</p>	<p>1/13</p>	
	<p>1/16</p>	<p>➤ Travel notice for Wuhan is raised to Level 2.</p>

¹ Text in purple indicates border control measures targeting foreign nationals; text in green indicates quarantine measures for arriving travelers; and text in red indicates border closures or bans on international transport.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The US activates a screening mechanism for travelers from Wuhan arriving at three major US airports. 	1/17		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The US reports its first confirmed case; the patient has a travel history to Wuhan. 	1/21	1/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Taiwan reports its first confirmed case, a Taiwanese businessperson returning from Wuhan. ➤ Travel notice for Wuhan is raised to Level 3, with travelers from the Chinese city being required to conduct a 14-day period of self-health management after arrival. Travelers from China (incl. Hong Kong and Macao) are required to fill in a health declaration form.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Wuhan and other cities in Hubei Province announce a lockdown. ➤ WHO declares that the outbreak does not yet constitute a global health emergency and that there is no evidence of human-to-human transmission outside China. 	1/23		
		1/25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Travel notice for Hubei Province is raised to Level 3.
		1/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Taiwan imposes an entry ban on Chinese citizens from Hubei (excl. spouses of Taiwanese nationals), suspends entry of Chinese citizens from other parts of China (incl. students studying in Taiwan but excl.

			<p>citizens holding special entry permits), and stops issuing entry permits to all Chinese citizens. Travelers from China are required to conduct a 14-day period of self-health management.</p> <p>Note: The number of Chinese citizens arriving in Taiwan decreases dramatically as a result.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Both Hong Kong and Macao impose an entry ban on Hubei residents and travelers with a travel history to Hubei within the past 14 days. ➤ Malaysia imposes entry ban on Chinese citizens from Hubei. 	1/27		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ WHO acknowledges that it has underestimated the disease outbreak and assesses the risk of spread to be high globally and very high in China. 	1/28		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Nepal closes its border with China. 	1/29		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ WHO declares the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). However, it urges countries not to restrict travel or trade with China. ➤ Russia closes its border with China and stops issuing visas to Chinese nationals. 	1/30		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Italy bans all flights to and from China. ➤ The US imposes an entry ban on foreign nationals who have been in China (excl. Hong Kong and Macao) during the past 14 days. US citizens returning from Hubei are required to undergo 14 days of mandatory isolation at designated facilities. ➤ Mongolia closes land border with China. ➤ Iran imposes entry ban on travelers from China. 	1/31		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Australia imposes entry ban on Chinese citizens and requires other foreign travelers arriving from or transiting through China to undergo 14 days of isolation. ➤ Japan imposes entry ban on foreign nationals who have been in Hubei within the past two weeks. ➤ Iran bans all flights to and from China. ➤ Vietnam bans all flights from China. 	2/1	2/1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ China's Guangdong Province is listed as a Level 2 area for the outbreak (with suspected community transmission) and an entry ban is imposed on Guangdong residents.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ New Zealand and Australia cancel certain flights to and from China. ➤ Singapore imposes entry ban on travelers with a travel history to China (incl. transit) within the past 14 days and suspends visa 	2/2	2/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Chinese city of Wenzhou is listed as a Level 2 area for the outbreak and an entry ban is imposed on Wenzhou residents.

<p>issuance to Chinese nationals.</p> <p>➤ The Philippines imposes an entry ban on travelers from China (incl. Hong Kong and Macao), stops issuing visas-on-arrival to Chinese nationals, and suspends all flights to and from Wuhan indefinitely.</p>			
<p>➤ Jordan imposes entry ban on travelers with a travel history to China (incl. transit) within the past 14 days.</p>	2/3		
		2/4	<p>➤ Cruise ships that have previously docked in China (incl. Hong Kong and Macao) are prohibited from docking at Taiwanese ports.</p>
<p>➤ Vietnam imposes entry ban on Chinese nationals and foreign travelers from China.</p>	2/5	2/5	<p>➤ China in its entirety (incl. Hong Kong and Macao) is listed as a Level 2 area for the outbreak.</p>
		2/6	<p>➤ All international cruise ships are prohibited from docking at Taiwanese ports.</p>
<p>➤ Indonesia imposes entry and transit ban on travelers with a travel history to China (incl. transit) within the past 14 days, and suspends visa issuance to Chinese nationals.</p>	2/7	2/7	<p>➤ Entry into Taiwan is suspended for all Chinese nationals (excl. residents of Hong Kong and Macao) arriving from anywhere in the world.</p> <p>➤ An entry ban is imposed on foreign nationals (excl. those holding valid Resident Certificate) with a travel history to China (incl. Hong Kong and Macao) within the</p>

			<p>past 14 days.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Travelers with a travel history to China (incl. Hong Kong and Macao) within the past 14 days are required to observe a 14-day period of home quarantine after arrival.
<p>Health for All</p>  <p>2/10</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The mini three links are suspended. ➤ All cross-strait passenger flights are suspended, except for those to and from Beijing Capital, Shanghai Pudong, Shanghai Hongqiao, Xiamen Gaoqi, and Chengdu Shuangliu airports. ➤ Arriving passengers who have transited through China (incl. Hong Kong and Macao) are required to observe a 14-day period of home quarantine after arrival.
		2/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Travel notice for China (incl. Hong Kong and Macao) is raised to Level 3; Taiwanese nationals are advised to avoid nonessential travel to China. ➤ Entry into Taiwan is suspended for Hong Kong and Macao residents, including students.

Phase 2 border control: preventing spread from other countries

Date	Measures taken in Taiwan
2/11	Travel notice for Singapore is raised to Level 2; Level 1 travel notice announced for Thailand. All arriving travelers are required to fill in a health declaration form.
2/14	Level 1 travel notice is announced for Japan.
2/20	Travel notices for Japan and South Korea are raised to Level 2.
2/23	Level 1 travel notices are announced for Iran and Italy.
2/24	Travel notice for South Korea is raised to Level 3.
2/24	Travelers from countries and areas listed under travel notices Level 1 and 2 are required to observe a 14-day period of self-health management, and those from countries under Level 3 a 14-day home quarantine.
2/25	Travel notice for Italy is raised to Level 2.
2/26	Travel notice for Iran is raised to Level 2.
2/27	Travel notice for Italy is raised to Level 3.
3/1	Travel notice for Iran is raised to Level 3.
3/7	Travel notices for France, Germany, and Spain are raised to Level 2.
3/11	Travel notices for the following countries are raised to Level 2: <u>Europe</u> Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland; and <u>Middle East</u> Bahrain and Kuwait. Level 1 travel notices are announced for the following countries: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the UK.
3/14	Travelers from the Schengen Area, Ireland, the UK, and Dubai who are already onboard a flight at 2 p.m. Taipei Standard Time will be required to conduct enhanced self-health management after arrival, while those who board a flight after this time will be required to undergo a 14-day home quarantine.
3/15	Travel notice for Egypt is raised to Level 2.
3/17	Travel notices for numerous countries in Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa, as well as the US states of California, New York, and Washington, are raised to Level 3. Travelers from these countries and areas are required to undergo a 14-day home quarantine after arrival.
3/19	Travel notices for 19 Asian countries (incl. Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam), as well as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the US (incl. transit) are raised to Level 3. An entry ban is imposed on all foreign nationals (excl. those holding a valid

	Resident Certificate or special entry permit).
3/20	The National Immigration Agency introduces the Expanded Overstayers Voluntary Departure Program, encouraging foreign visitors (including missing migrant workers) who have exceeded their visa's duration of stay to turn themselves in between March 20 and June 30. Those who do so will be neither detained nor given an entry ban, and they will only be given a minimum fine. The NIA will also help them return to their home country as soon as possible.
3/21	Travel notices for all countries and areas are raised to Level 3. The Bureau of Consular Affairs announces that all travelers who entered Taiwan on or before March 21, 2020, on a visitor visa or landing visa or through a visa-waiver program and who have not exceeded their visa's duration of stay will be granted an automatic 30-day extension of their duration of stay.
3/24	Ban is imposed on foreign airline passengers transiting in Taiwan.
4/17	BOCA announces that all foreign visitors who entered Taiwan legally on or before March 21, 2020, will be granted a second automatic 30-day extension of their duration of stay.



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