



The facts regarding Taiwan’s email to alert WHO to possible danger of COVID-19



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In response to WHO’s denial that Taiwan ever alerted it to the possibility of human-to-human transmission of COVID-19, the Central Epidemic Command Center makes the following statement today, April 11:

1. The Taiwan Centers for Disease Control (Taiwan CDC) learned from online sources that there had been at least seven cases of atypical pneumonia in Wuhan, China. In China, the term “atypical pneumonia” is commonly used to refer to SARS, a disease transmitted between humans caused by coronavirus.
2. Owing to its experience with the SARS epidemic in 2003, Taiwan vigilantly kept track of information about the new outbreak. On December 31, 2019, Taiwan sent an email to the International Health Regulations (IHR) focal point under the World Health Organization (WHO), informing WHO of its understanding of the disease and also requesting further information from WHO. Given the lack of clarity at the time, as well as the many rumors that were circulating, Taiwan’s aim was to ensure that all relevant parties remained alert, especially since the outbreak occurred just before the Lunar New Year holiday, which typically sees tremendous amounts of travel. To be prudent, in the email we took pains to refer to atypical pneumonia, and specifically noted that patients had been isolated for treatment. Public health professionals could discern from this wording that there was a real possibility of human-to-human transmission of the disease. However, because at the time there were as yet no cases of the disease in Taiwan, we could not state directly and conclusively that there had been human-to-human transmission.
3. The Taiwan CDC also contacted the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention in a bid to obtain more information. However, in response to our inquiries, the WHO IHR focal point only responded with a short message stating that Taiwan’s information had been forwarded to expert colleagues; China provided only a press release.
4. Even though Taiwan strongly suspected that human-to-human transmission of the disease was already occurring at the time, we were unable to gain confirmation through existing channels. Therefore, on the day the aforementioned email was sent to WHO, the Taiwan government activated enhanced border control and quarantine measures based on the assumption that human-to-human transmission was in fact occurring. These measures included screening passengers on flights from Wuhan prior to disembarkation.
5. In mid-January, the Taiwan CDC dispatched experts to Wuhan to gain a better understanding of the epidemic, the control measures taken there, and patients’ exposure history. Based on preliminary research, Taiwan determined that this form of pneumonia could indeed spread via human-to-human transmission.