WHO Declares Coronavirus Outbreak a Global Pandemic

Over the past week, the coronavirus outbreak has grown worldwide, prompting the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare it as a global pandemic. Here in the United States, more than 1,000 people have now been diagnosed with the virus, and government officials across the country have begun to enact measures to try and contain the spread of it. Last night, President Trump announced that he would be banning most foreign travelers from Europe for the next 30 days, effective Friday at midnight. These restrictions apply only to foreign nationals, and not U.S. citizens, green card holders, or the families of U.S. citizens. Additionally, the U.S. House of Representatives is slated to take up a bill which would provide several coronavirus relief measures including free testing, paid emergency leave, and food security assistance.

Prior to their announcement on Wednesday, the WHO had merely talked about the "threat" or the "potential" for a pandemic, but with 114 countries now reporting cases of the coronavirus, the organization upgraded their language and labelled it a global pandemic. They also emphasized that public health interventions can still limit the spread of the virus even where it is being widely transmitted, as authorities have shown particularly in China, South Korea, and Singapore. These countries have been able to bring their outbreaks under control with aggressive measures and widespread testing, and WHO officials are asking that other nations follow suit.

Outside of China, Italy has the largest coronavirus outbreak and has taken drastic action to try and curtail the spread of the disease. The country has over 12,000 infections and more than 800 deaths. Recently, Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte announced emergency measures to combat the virus, including travel restrictions and a ban on public gatherings. This was initially put into place in certain regions of the country that were hardest hit by the disease, however Conte later extended these to the entire country as cases of the virus have now been confirmed in all 20 regions of Italy. Under the restrictions, all shops have been ordered to be closed except food stores and pharmacies. Furthermore, all sporting events have been suspended nationwide, and schools and universities will remain closed until early April. Prime Minister Conte has also ordered people to stay home and seek permission for travel only in cases where it is essential.

Globally, there are now more than 120,000 cases of the coronavirus, with over 4,500 fatalities. In addition to China and Italy, there are some other nations that have been hit particularly hard by the virus. Iran for example, has reported more than 8,000 cases and almost 300 deaths. Public gatherings, including Friday prayers in major cities have been cancelled, schools have been closed, and cleaners have worked to disinfect trains and buses. In South Korea, schools have been closed until late March and the country has implemented drive-through screening clinics where people can get medical exams to test for the virus. Lastly, in France, a nationwide ban on gatherings of more than 1,000 people has been put into place and President Emmanuel Macron has advised citizens against visiting older friends and relatives to avoid spreading the disease to those that are most vulnerable.

Overall, the coronavirus has been found on every continent except for Antarctica. Officials and experts have warned that the pandemic could get worse before it gets better, especially in countries like the United States that have still yet to feel its full effect. However, these nations can and should take actions now to limit the continued growth of the virus as much as possible.