

CHINA

Medical check

A medical worker directs a patient into a military tent to conduct initial health exams outside Changhai Hospital in Shanghai on Monday. Four tents are being used for triage to improve air circulation and reduce risks of cross infection.

LIU XIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Hubei governor calls for faster diagnoses

By ZHOU LIHUA in Wuhan and CUI JIA in Beijing

The governor of Hubei province urged local authorities to have all samples of the novel coronavirus tested within two days.

The procedures for sending samples must be streamlined to ensure speedy diagnosis, and third party centers will play a more important role. Those that cannot diagnose remaining samples within two days will be held accountable, Hubei Daily quoted Governor Wang Xiaodong as saying during a meeting on Sunday.

Delays in diagnoses in Hubei — the epicenter of the outbreak — have become a key obstacle in controlling the epidemic, Liu Ziyang, director of the Health Commission of Hubei province, said during a news conference held in the provincial capital of Wuhan on Thursday.

There are 89 places in Hubei that can diagnose samples, including provincial and city level disease control and prevention centers as

well as 41 hospitals and third party diagnosis centers, she added. "Their maximum capacity is 6,000 diagnoses a day."

Meanwhile, biopharmaceutical companies around China have been working around the clock to produce testing kits.

"The production of the diagnostic kits can basically meet the demand while the manufacturers continue to increase production capacity that is about 60 to 70 percent currently due to the Spring Festival holiday," said Tian Yulong, chief engineer of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

There are mainly two types of diagnostic kits that are being developed and used for the novel coronavirus: one that directly tests for the antibody that human bodies produce to fight the virus; and the other that tests for the nucleic acid of the virus, which is more accurate, but extracting the nucleic acid from blood samples is relatively time consuming.

Two diagnostic kits for the antibody of the novel coronavirus joint-

ly developed by the Wuhan Institute of Virology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and a biopharmaceutical company are in production and soon will be released to the market, Wang Wei, a leading official of the Hubei Department of Science and Technology, said during a news conference held in Wuhan on Sunday evening.

"The kits are easy to operate and can protect the users from getting infected," Wang said.

Also, teams at Zhongnan Hospital of Wuhan University have optimized the procedure of extracting the nucleic acid of the virus, which has helped cut diagnosis time in half. The fastest diagnosis time is only two hours, he added.

Besides making faster diagnoses, the experts have also been working hard to develop vaccines and drugs to fight the virus.

"Animal experiments in which primates are infected with the virus have been carried out, and the infection model on primates has been established. This will further support the development of vac-

ines," Wang said. "Also, two chemical compounds have been proven to be effective in restraining the activity of the virus, which will speed up the process of developing drugs to treat patients."

Zhang Dingyu, president of Wuhan Jinyintan Hospital, said at the news conference on Sunday that the hospital was the first to use Kaletra — a medication for the treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDS — to treat patients with the novel coronavirus.

"It seems that Kaletra is effective on patients with early symptoms. It can help prevent the disease from getting severe and life threatening, but we still need stronger evidence," said Zhang, adding that he has noticed that Kaletra is seen as a cure for the novel coronavirus on the internet.

Zhang warned people that the side effects of Kaletra include gastrointestinal discomfort, allergy and hepatic damage.

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China cracking down on fake face masks, price gouging

By WANG KEJU wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn

China's top market regulator has stepped up inspections on face mask price hikes and is cracking down on illegal production and sales as part of efforts to curb the spread of pneumonia caused by the novel coronavirus.

Gan Lin, deputy chief of the State Administration for Market Regulation, said at a news conference held by the State Council Information Office on Monday that the administration has been strengthening efforts to ensure the price and quality of related medical products.

As of Saturday, market regulation authorities had dispatched 390,000 people nationwide to improve supervision on prices of epidemic protective equipment and punish illegal activities such as hoarding or fabricating information about price hikes, she said.

A drugstore in Beijing's Fengtai district, for example, was fined 3 million yuan (\$427,000) recently for increasing the price of face

masks to 850 yuan per box, almost six times the normal price.

The administration has also spared no efforts to crack down on the production and sale of unqualified, counterfeit or expired antiviral face masks in a bid to safeguard public interests, Gan said.

With people across the country stockpiling face masks to protect themselves from the novel coronavirus on one hand and many pharmacies and e-commerce platforms running out of stock on the other hand, some factories have been fabricating medical masks.

In Foshan, Guangdong province, local authorities have shut down a factory making medical masks without a license and seized over 175,000 fake masks, together with three pieces of production equipment and over 80 boxes of materials.

According to the Ministry of Public Security, the ministry's food and drug crime investigation bureau has arrested 75 suspects and seized more than 1.42 million problematic face masks as of Saturday.

3 million yuan

Fine issued to a drugstore in Beijing's Fengtai district that increased the price of a box of face masks to almost six times of its normal price

For the control and prevention of the novel coronavirus-caused pneumonia, the administration has also taken aim at the sales and shipment of wild animals as the geographical distribution of infection cases in Hubei's provincial capital Wuhan — the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak — indicated a close relationship between the outbreak and illegal sales of wildlife in a market.

Wild animals that are likely to carry the novel coronavirus pose grave health risks to the public, Gan said at video conference on Sunday. As a result, the local market regulation authority is enforcing strong measures against wildlife markets and investigating and punishing violators to cut off

the source of viruses.

The administration, together with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, issued a joint statement recently that trading of wild animals will be suspended nationwide, and the ban will continue until the epidemic has ended.

The administration will strengthen inspections on marketplaces, supermarkets and dining places, as well as enhance the monitoring and supervision of e-commerce sites, Gan said, adding that it will work closely with the public security department to investigate and punish any businesses and operators breaching the ban.

According to the Ministry of Public Security, police forces in the provinces of Hubei, Fujian, Yunnan, Jiangxi and Sichuan have so far investigated nearly 60 cases of illegally purchasing, trafficking and selling wild animals and confiscated over 5,600 items, as well as 500 kilograms of wild animal products.

Officials urge boost in mental health services

Commission requiring provinces to offer psychological support amid outbreak

By WANG XIAOYU and CHENG SI

To address anxiety and mental health concerns triggered by the novel coronavirus outbreak, the National Health Commission has required provincial-level regions to integrate psychological support resources and standardize such public services.

Wang Bin, deputy director of the commission's disease control and prevention bureau, said local governments should coordinate a variety of mental health hotlines provided by education authorities, civil affairs departments or social organizations, while offering training and guidance to hotline operators.

"Colleges equipped with psychological centers are also encouraged to step up intervention and counseling to students who may be affected by the disease's spread," she said at a news conference held on Monday.

The commission has recently released a protocol guiding emergency mental interventions during the novel coronavirus outbreak.

The guideline proposes a four-tier system based on the risk of developing mental issues, with patients confirmed of contracting the virus, front-line medical workers, disease prevention and management staff being placed on the highest level.

A video clip circulated online recently shows a doctor in a protective suit bursting into tears and shouting into a phone. The doctor in Wuhan, Hubei province, where the virus first surfaced, later told the local newspaper Changjiang Daily that he was negotiating with supervisors on refitting the quarantine wards to

take better care of patients.

Days of intensive work had exhausted him and caused him to lose his temper for a brief moment, he was quoted as saying. The doctor quickly collected himself and went back to treating patients.

Yang Fude, Party secretary of the Beijing Huilongguan Hospital, a psychiatric specialty hospital, said many medical workers and personnel in charge of registering and screening residents in neighborhoods have faced tremendous pressure and are pushing their mental and physical limits.

"Administrators should set up proper shift schedules to allow enough rest between work assignments," he said. "It is also suggested that front-line workers learn to relieve stress through simple workouts or communicating with friends and family members."

For residents in Wuhan and several neighboring cities that are under strict lockdown, with public transportation halted and flights and trains suspended, Chen Xuefeng, deputy director of the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Psychology, said it is an instinct to become overtly agitated in regions hit hardest by the virus.

"I suggest people faced with travel restrictions take a rational view of the decision and take the initiative to learn about protection measures and psychological relief methods," she said.

The Hubei government has also set up a psychological support hotline, 4007-027-520, that went into operation on Friday. Experienced counselors will receive calls from 9 am to 9 pm each day.

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Hebei therapists help medics cope in Wuhan

A team of therapists in Hebei province are providing online psychological counseling to medical staff combating the novel coronavirus on the front line in Wuhan.

The team of 23 therapists started providing counseling services on Sunday to medics sent to Wuhan from Hebei, said Li Keqing, head of the Hebei Provincial Mental Health Center based in Baoding city.

A dozen medical staff had applied for the service as of Monday, Li said.

The province has sent more than 200 medical personnel from local hospitals to Wuhan to support front-line work, previous media reports said.

"Facing the emergency task, their minds might be affected by a series of things, including a changing environment, long work hours and witnessing death," Li said, adding that timely counseling can help them deal with problems such as anxiety, depression and frustration.

He said the services are available 24

hours a day and appointments will be arranged according to schedules of the medical staff.

Yu Xuezhu, one of the therapists, conducted a session with a female nurse through WeChat on Monday morning.

"Through chatting with her, I found that she is not used to the local food in Wuhan, she couldn't go to sleep at night due to mental pressure, and she is not confident with herself doing the job," Yu said.

After an hour or so of counseling, during which Yu taught the nurse a few methods to go to sleep and how she can adjust her mindset, the nurse's tension and stress was relieved, she said.

Other places in the country have taken similar measures to ease pressure on medical staff fighting the epidemic, including Shanghai and the provinces of Shaanxi and Sichuan.

ZHANG YU

FROM THE GRASSROOTS | OUT OF POVERTY

Fresh vegetables feed Guizhou's poverty fight

By YANG JUN in Guiyang yangjun@chinadaily.com.cn

Fresh vegetables from Bijie, a mountainous region in Guizhou province, have been sold across the country and to overseas markets as the industry's development is helping rural villagers out of poverty.

Yang Zhaomai, a farmer in Weining county of Bijie, whose income mainly depends on planting corn and potatoes on her 0.2 hectares of land, used to worry about her two children's tuition. She now earns at least 3,000 (\$430) yuan a month after joining a local vegetable planting base.

"The base offers a basic daily sala-

ry of 80 yuan. A skillful worker can earn 150 yuan a day," Yang said.

She said farmers have spare time in winter, as crops in their own fields are harvested. The base now provides them additional income.

At an average altitude of 2,200 meters, traditional crops such as corn and potatoes have low yields in Weining, but it can grow high-quality vegetables — such as cabbage, and white radish — with advantages of fewer plant diseases and pests.

Weining has built six vegetable planting bases to provide jobs for poverty-stricken households since June.

To ensure production and sales,

leading agricultural enterprises in the province are helping to build rural cooperatives and sign vegetable planting orders. The vegetables are sold in cities like Beijing and Shanghai, and some are exported to Southeast Asian countries like Thailand and Vietnam.

"We organize companies to participate in promotional activities for agricultural products, and set favorable policies to support the exports," said Xie Hong, deputy director of local agriculture and rural affairs bureau.

By the end of 2019, the county's total planting area of vegetables reached 80,000 hectares, with an expected production of 6 million metric tons and an output value of

4.5 billion yuan, helping 65,000 impoverished people escape poverty.

In addition to vegetables, 11 other kinds of crops with high output value, such as tea, Chinese medicinal herbs and edible mushrooms, are helping Guizhou revitalize its rural economy.

In recent years, Guizhou has made significant achievements in poverty alleviation. Last year, 1.2 million people in Guizhou escaped poverty, lowering the poverty rate to less than 1 percent.

"Guizhou will eliminate absolute poverty in the first half of 2020," Sun Zhigang, the province's Party secretary, said during the provincial poverty alleviation and development conference held in the provincial capital Guiyang on Jan 5.

Zhao Yandi contributed to this story.



Farmers harvest cabbages at a planting base in Bijie, Guizhou province, in June. CHEN WUSHUI / FOR CHINA DAILY