

CHINA

Coronavirus Outbreak

Admitted for treatment



A novel coronavirus pneumonia patient is admitted into Taikang Tongji Hospital in Wuhan, Hubei province, on Monday. The patient was among dozens who became the first NCP patients at the hospital, which was scheduled to open later during the first half of this year but launched early to ease the shortage of hospital beds in the outbreak's epicenter. JIN ZHENQIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Guideline aims at deliberate novel coronavirus spreaders

Offenders could face a minimum of three years in prison, notice says

By CAO YIN

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People intentionally spreading the novel coronavirus or harming medical workers during the epidemic will be held criminally liable and severely punished in line with a new judicial guideline.

The guideline stipulates that people confirmed to be carrying the virus could be charged with endangering public security by dangerous methods if they refuse to be quarantined or leave before their quarantine time is up and enter public places or take public transportation.

If those suspected of carrying the infection exhibit such behavior, and their behavior leads to the spread of the virus, they could also face similar charges, according to the guideline jointly issued on Monday by the Supreme People's Court, the Supreme People's Procuratorate, and the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Justice.

Under the Chinese Criminal Law, those convicted will face jail terms

ranging from three to 10 years if the consequence is not serious. If their behavior causes serious injury or death or results in a great economic loss of public property, those convicted will face more than 10 years imprisonment, a life sentence or even death.

The guideline — which focuses on 10 offenses related to interference with prevention and control efforts, including the deliberate spread of the virus, harm to medical workers and sales of counterfeit goods — “aims to help judicial authorities fight the crimes by accurately applying laws,” said Yang Wanming, vice-president of the SPC.

“Judicial departments at each level should make people's lives and health top priorities ... and offer strong legal protection to help win the battle against the disease,” he added.

In the wake of recent cases in which doctors were harmed by patients or their relatives, the guideline also clarifies that during the epidemic period, people tearing medical workers' protective gear or

spitting at them and causing them to become infected will be charged with intentional injury.

In addition, those who hinder measures taken by government officials to control the outbreak by means of threats or violence could also be charged with disturbing public service, it said, adding that those who attack police on duty will face harsher punishment for the same charge.

“Every individual must receive medical tests and undergo sample collection or quarantine from medical institutes or prevention and control authorities under the law on the prevention and control of infectious disease, and dispense the truth based on facts,” said legislator Yuan Jie.

Confirmed and suspected cases should follow medical treatment and quarantine before they are cured “to demonstrate responsibility for themselves as well as for their family members, friends and others,” he said.

“Strictly fighting crimes related to the epidemic control work is a major responsibility of police officers,” said Du Hangwei, vice-minister of public security, adding they

will strictly implement the guideline and regulate behavior in law enforcement.

“We'll severely punish offenders who seriously interfere in the outbreak fight, but for those without malicious intention and whose behaviors do not cause a lot of harm, we'll educate them first,” he added.

Prosecutors have also taken action since discovering violations in epidemic control, according to Wan Chun, a senior official from the SPP. He released a rough statistic during a news conference on Monday that prosecuting authorities had dealt with 324 cases relating to outbreak prevention and work as of Feb 7.

“Epidemic-related cases will be prosecuted in accordance with laws as quickly as possible,” he said, adding that supervision of food, medicine safety and wildlife protection will also be strengthened.

As for new business problems that small and micro-sized enterprises may encounter during the epidemic, Vice-Minister of Justice Xiong Xuanguo also said they will offer legal services to help them overcome business difficulties.

Zhejiang hopes QR code system can help curb virus

By MA ZHENHUAN in Hangzhou and YANG JUN in Guiyang

Zhejiang province is working on a unified health QR code system to prevent the spread of the epidemic and support its residents' health to help them resume working.

In Hangzhou, capital of the province, a health QR code system was launched on Tuesday. Residents and those coming to the city need to apply online and get their own code categorized by green, red or yellow. The colors are based on the health information applicants give.

Those who plan to come to Hangzhou need to obtain a green code, and only those with green codes may travel around the city. Those with red or yellow must undergo seven to 14 days of quarantine.

Meanwhile, the province began to assess the risks of the novel coronavirus infection in all its counties and districts and unveiled a list of regions with different risk levels on Monday, hoping to further improve prevention and control.

Sun Liming, deputy director of the Zhejiang Health Commission, said at a news briefing that the provincial government had evaluated the risk of people being infected with the virus in different regions based on indicators including the number of confirmed patients, the ratio of patients to all residents and cases arising from gatherings.

“We use the colors of red, orange, yellow, blue and green to mark counties and regions with high risk, comparatively high risk, moderate risk, comparatively low risk and low risk, respectively,” Sun noted.

Yueqing, a city with 155 confirmed cases of the virus as of midnight on Sunday, is identified as the only high-risk region.

Twelve counties and districts in Zhejiang where no confirmed cases have been found so far, including Chun'an, Anji and Wuyi, are low-risk regions, according to the list.

Feng Kui, a scholar in city management at the National Development and Reform Commission, told news portal Yicai.com that classifying regions based on the severity of

the novel coronavirus spread is valuable in making policies and preventive measures.

The main task for places that are slightly affected by the outbreak should be strict management over the entry and exit of vehicles and people, he said, adding that as long as the gates are controlled, it would be possible for local companies to resume production.

Zheng Keqiang, an expert in social governance and economic development at Nanchang University, told China Daily on Tuesday that the whole country is exploring effective ways to curb the coronavirus spread.

“It is unknown if classification management will work in the prevention and control of the virus,” Zheng said, noting that further observation is needed in the following days.

For individuals, the list of regions with risk levels is a direct reminder for people, especially community workers and deliverymen, to take steps to avoid infection, said Xu Dewei, a Hangzhou resident.

“My family currently stays in Fuyang district, which is a comparatively low-risk region. So we won't go back to Xihu district where our home is for now, because the risk level there is moderate,” she said.

Nationwide, a number of less-infected regions have taken a raft of measures to thoroughly screen out potential infectors and promote the gradual resumption of work.

In Guizhou province, for example, about 37,000 people, such as those who returned to Guizhou from Hubei have taken nucleic acid tests, among which 60 samples tested positive.

Over 10 test-takers among those 60 had no clear symptoms of infection.

“Patients with no clear symptoms pose a big challenge and risk to our next step in preventive efforts. It is imperative to locate them and put them under medical observation or control,” said Zhang Yuqiong, director of the Guizhou Center for Disease Control and Prevention on Monday.

Qin Jirong contributed to this story.

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Nursing homes taking extra precautions for residents

By LI LEI

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Seniors at nursing homes observed an unusual Lantern Festival on Saturday amid the national outbreak of the novel coronavirus and the unprecedented efforts to contain its spread.

Normally, people invite parents to their homes for a sticky rice dumpling-themed dinner, which is meant for family reunions and other celebrations marking the end of the Chinese New Year festivities.

But on the first full moon in the Year of the Rat, aging parents were instructed to spend the day on their own since strict quarantines have been imposed over the past few weeks to keep the deadly pathogen out of the most vulnerable groups.

At the Xinglong Retirement Home in Chengdu, Sichuan province, the cafeteria prepared rice dumplings for 56 seniors who might experience emotional slumps because they cannot be with their families. The rest home was sealed off on Jan 24, the eve of the Spring Festival, after confirmed cases continued to climb nationally.

“In response, we canceled the New Year vacation for all staff members,” Di Xiaobing, the facility's director, told the China News Service on Saturday.

The outbreak disrupted celebrations during the Spring Festival, China's biggest holiday. Normally, tens of millions of people travel ahead of the festival for family reunions and sightseeing.

But to avoid cross infection, many have remained home and shunned gatherings to avoid crowds.

To keep seniors safe, Di said, they have closely monitored the body temperatures of the residents, whose ages range between 50 and 92. They have also required hand-washing before entering the cafeteria,

increased the distance between tables and prohibited sitting face-to-face while eating in an attempt to reduce infection risks.

The Chengdu retirement home was just one of many such facilities across China that has made adjustments in response to the outbreak. The virus has killed more than 1,000 on the Chinese mainland as of Monday and has prompted authorities to lock down several major cities, including Wuhan, Hubei province, where it emerged in December.

To aid the adaptations, the Ministry of Civil Affairs released a guideline on Jan 28 on how nursing facilities should cope, detailing dos and don'ts ranging from entrance guards to psychological counseling.

The ministry updated the requirements on Friday, ordering regular temperature checks, discouraging seniors and staff members from leaving nursing homes without proper reasons and requiring operators to set up isolation rooms for returnees. Those who return should be placed under quarantine for 14 days — the time needed for infected patients to show symptoms including cough, fever and stomach issues.

The guideline gave detailed requirements for room ventilation, disinfection and food preparation. It also called for the monitoring of seniors' emotions and installing advisers for psychological issues.

The median age of novel coronavirus patients is 47, according to recent research conducted by a research team led by Zhong Nanshan, a prominent scientist who is leading a government-appointed panel of experts helping to control the outbreak.

The research, which was based on a sample of 1,099 patients selected from 552 hospitals across the nation, has found more than 25 percent of those surveyed have at least one underlying condition, suggesting that the elderly population was more vulnerable.

Courts make use of online platforms amid epidemic

By CAO YIN

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When Chen Shi, a judge with Beijing No 1 Intermediate People's Court, was worried that some trials would not begin on time because of the ongoing pneumonia caused by the novel coronavirus, an online platform helped her solve the problem.

The app, developed by Beijing High People's Court, is called Yunshenpan, which literally means ‘trial in the cloud’.

On Feb 4, Chen finished hearing a private loan dispute through the platform with a video communication system, “which not only met the litigation demands of the two parties, but also ensured their health and safety during the epidemic period,” she said.

Before the hearing, she first got the litigants' approval to use the platform and taught them to install software on a laptop or download a smartphone application.

“It was easy. It took them about two or three minutes to log in to the system, and both of the litigants could talk with each other and also with me online quickly,” she said.

A lawyer for one of the litigants was in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region.

“If he was back in Beijing to attend the trial, he would have first had to be quarantined for at least 14 days, which means our hearing might not have begun on time,” Chen said. “But thanks to the platform, the difficulty was solved.”

Originally, all of the judge's case hearings scheduled for the following week were canceled due to the epidemic, but since the platform was put into use on Feb 3, “my concerns about trial delays have been alleviated a lot,” she added.

A statistic released by the high court on Wednesday also showed that courts across the city have used the online platform to hear cases 78 times since Feb 3, helping reduce visits and gatherings in courts.

Li Xiang, director of the technology department in the high court, said the online platform could support eight people at most to communicate by video at the same time during a trial, “and the litigation process will be recorded via a video recognition system”.

Considering that the epidemic may last for some time, the Supreme People's Court, the country's top court, ordered courts at all levels to guide litigants to file cases or mediate disputes online, encouraging judges to make full use of



Zhang Hui, a judge from Shizhong District People's Court in Zaozhuang, Shandong province, tries a labor dispute case via the internet on Monday. SUN ZHONGZHE / FOR CHINA DAILY

online systems for litigation, including those for case filing and ruling delivery, to ensure litigants and their lawyers get better legal services and protection.

Dong Bingbing, a judge from Shushan District People's Court in Hefei, Anhui province, heard three cases relating to contract disputes on Feb 5 via an online system developed by courts in Anhui. In his view, such online trials are more suitable for dealing with easy lawsuits, not those that are more complex.

“Complicated disputes and those that demand litigants to offer abundant evidence still need to be postponed during the epi-

demic,” he said, calling for courts nationwide not to file new cases during the period, “because a new filing means litigants and their attorneys should go out to discover evidence, which is not good amid efforts to prevent and control the disease”.

“People's health and safety must always be the top priority, compared with their litigation rights,” he added.

The top court also suggested litigants submit materials through the internet or by post, adding that people can dial 12368, a litigation service hotline, to follow their lawsuits or ask for legal services.