



Coronavirus: How Taiwan successfully prevented the spread of the epidemic

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With the outbreak of coronavirus in Italy and many European countries, Greece is also trying hard to avoid the spread of the virus from neighboring countries. As the front line against the coronavirus, Taiwan is only 81 miles off the coast of China and was expected to have the second highest number of cases of coronavirus due to its intensive interaction with China geographically and economically. For example, Taiwan has 23 million citizens of which more than 3 million Taiwanese nationals live or work in China. In 2019, 2.7 million Chinese visitors traveled to Taiwan and 600 direct flights per week between both sides. However, Taiwan now has 45 confirmed cases while neighboring countries like South Korea, Japan, and China have hundreds or thousands of cases.

But what Taiwan has done to prevent the disease effectively from China and other countries? How we can learn from Taiwan?

1. Enforce strict border control and quarantine measures

First, Taiwan decisively recognized and acted against the crisis at the early stage of the outbreak in China. Taiwan took notice seriously of the virus in early December as most of countries and even the WHO didn't react positively. In response, the government of Taiwan started onboard quarantine of all direct flights from Wuhan in December and enforce strict temperature measuring and quarantine at the port of entry. Taiwan also cut off flights from most of China and prohibited Chinese nationals to enter Taiwan in late January, much earlier than other Asian country's actions for border control.

2. Use big data analytics and technology to establish the quarantine system

Second, Taiwan leveraged its national health insurance database and integrated it with its immigration and customs database to begin the creation of big data for analytics; it generated real-time alerts during a clinical visit based on travel history and clinical symptoms to aid case identification. It also used new technology, including QR code scanning and online reporting of travel history and health symptoms to classify travelers' infectious risks based on flight origin and travel history in the past 14 days. On February 14, the Entry Quarantine System was launched, so travelers can complete the health declaration form by scanning a QR code that leads to an online form, either prior to departure from or upon arrival at a Taiwan airport. A mobile health declaration pass was then sent via SMS to phones using a local telecom operator, which allowed for faster immigration clearance for those with minimal risk. This system was created within a 72-hour period. On February 18, all hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies in Taiwan would have access to patients' travel histories.

3. Ensure mask supply and resource allocation

Third, to ensure the supply for masks, Taiwan banned the export of local masks on January 24 and limited the number of masks sent by passengers and couriers. From February 6, masks are being purchased under the real-name system. Taiwan citizens need to use health insurance cards to purchase from special drug bureaus. At the same time, the government installed 60 lines of machines of surgical mask and medical protection clothes which can manufacture 10 million masks a day. Most part of the masks reserved for medical workers

and children. With the government control of the mask, the price of a mask costs only 0.15 euros each. Taiwan has become the second largest mask export country in the world. Besides, in order to minimize the economic impacts of the virus, parliament approved a \$1.96 billion stimulus package for companies shaken by the outbreak. After the virus subsides, the government will come out with discount vouchers to encourage spending.

4. **Reassure and Educate the Public, While Fighting Misinformation**

The National Health Command Center and Central Epidemic Command Center, cross-ministerial entities provide daily press briefings to the public about the latest situation internally and internationally. People can also receive all the information through the official application on the cell phone. These announcements included when and where to wear a mask, the importance of handwashing, the treatment of the confirmed cases and all the measure taken by the government, to ensure the correct information and gain the trust by the people, meanwhile to fight the fake news.

There is one reason the response in Taiwan has been far more resilient – it is a democracy that has greater transparency and accountability. Keeping information transparent is not only important during a crisis, but also in times of normalcy, to build confidence in a system and encourage citizens to trust that the government is equipped to handle a crisis. Besides, Taiwan's health care system has been ranked No. 1 among 93 countries around the world for two years in a row, according to Health Care Index released by Numbeo. Taiwan's advanced medical technology is world-renowned. Taiwan has 14 of the top 200 hospitals in the world, ranked third after the United States and Germany. Many medical institutions in Taiwan have the world's best medical professionals and advanced medical equipment and quality of medical services. Especially in liver transplantation, plastic surgery, cardiovascular surgery, artificial reproduction and more. It is a leader in the international medical community.

Taiwan's extraordinary performance on combating coronavirus has been praised internationally, even Taiwan has been excluded by the WHO since 2017 due to the political pressure by China. ***Taiwan has ability and willing to help to prevent the spread of disease. Taiwan's experience and effort on health issue deserve more support and applause from all over the world.***