

How Taiwan Curbs the COVID-19 Outbreak

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Given its proximity to China and the significant number of Taiwanese citizens working and residing there, as well as frequent international flights, Taiwan was expected to be heavily impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak. Yet Taiwan has so far managed to prevent the coronavirus from widely infecting its 23 million population.

According to the latest report, as of Monday March 9, there were 45 confirmed cases with 1 fatality with a previous condition. The infection figure is far lower than China and other countries. So, what steps did Taiwan take to achieve this?

Learning from the previous experience of the SARS outbreak, Taiwan was among the first countries to act early to prevent the virus from spreading. Taiwan's medical care system has long been globally recognized for its exceptionally high standards and is always willing to share experiences and contribute to global epidemic prevention. The measures taken by Taiwan to curb COVID-19 included the following:

1. **Establish a Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC):** Taiwan acted swiftly to establish a centralized operational and communication command center which was authorized to integrate necessary resources across the government and networks of public health experts to work collaboratively on outbreak prevention.
2. **Enforcing stringent visa and immigration control measures:** Taiwan implemented onboard quarantine of all direct flights arriving from Wuhan since Dec. 31, 2019, and started visa and immigration controls in Jan. 23, 2020 by restricting visitors' entries according to where they were traveling from. Visitors were either restricted entry or quarantined. Simultaneously, Taiwan deployed active surveillance and screening systems such as infrared thermal image scanning (ITIS) at all major airports and ports.
3. **Leverage and apply data analytics & information technology:** Taiwan fast integrated academic and IT experts to build up management system for the coordination of health and travel data, which facilitated doctors to immediately check the patient's travel history. It helped with more precise diagnosis and treatment for patients with flu-like symptoms and ensured they received proper medical care.

4. **Implement a transparent & timely system reporting:** CECC put in place a toll-free Communicable Disease Reporting and Consultation Hotline (1922) for the general public to report anytime and anywhere when there were concerns. The related agencies were also mobilized to enforce reporting procedures and guidance on quarantine measures, as well as prevent the public from spreading fake news on the epidemic.
5. **Educate the public extensively on preventive measures:** CECC proactively communicated daily with the public on the latest updates of the outbreak, including details on how new patients might have gotten sick and whether anyone else might be infected as well as issuing clear guidance on what people at schools, the workplace or public areas could do to help prevent the spread via TV, radio, smartphone app and the internet. Now almost every public building offers hand sanitizer and a lot of buildings or schools require that anyone entering submit to a fever check.
6. **Manage face mask production & distribution effectively:** The government swiftly collaborated with local industry technology research institutes and smart machinery & automation sectors to increase mask production to meet demands domestically. At the same time, the government rapidly stockpiled all masks in Taiwan and enforced a real-name purchase policy that only allowed people to purchase a limited number of masks per week. Smartphone apps were also quickly developed to inform citizens where masks were available for purchase and how many were left in stock.