Insight: Coronavirus

On 7 January 2020, Chinese authorities identified a strain of coronavirus, a family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases. This strain, novel coronavirus (nCoV), had not previously been identified in humans. Coronavirus can be transmitted between animals and people.

A Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) was declared by the WHO on 30 January, meaning a global coordinated effort is needed to enhance preparedness in other regions of the world. Temporary Recommendations were issued.

Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and death.

China Situation Report by National Health Commission, China as of 5 February

28,018 confirmed cases of Novel Coronavirus (Coronavirus)  
563 deaths reported to date  
42 confirmed cases reported in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan regions, of which 21 from Hong Kong SAR, 10 from Macao SAR, and 11 from Taiwan, China  
24,702 suspected cases

Risk Assessment:
The World Health Organisation’s risk assessment as of February 5

Very high in China  
High at the regional level  
High at the global level

About BCW

BCW’s global Reputation Risk & Crisis group, together with BCW’s Public Affairs teams in Beijing and Hong Kong, provides our industry’s best experts armed with the latest strategies, tools and resources for reducing reputational risk and, when crises are unavoidable, successfully managing them – anytime, anywhere. We have extensive client experience around the globe in both crisis and education programs involving a number of important public health issues and situations, including Ebola, swine flu (H1N1), avian flu, SARS and BSE.

BCW’s checklist for communicators in China

Insight
Monitor official sources of intelligence, such as the information from the Central Leading Group on Battling the Coronavirus, the National Health Commission of China, and the World Health Organization, as well as the advice from the authorities of your home country.

Media and social media monitoring & alerts allow you to stay up-to-date with a fast-moving situation. Ensure you understand public sentiment and other issue dynamics.

Ensure that your message is cognizant of official advisories – for example in relation to travel restrictions - as they evolve.

Communications
Proactively communicate with employees first, prioritising their safety. They expect communication in times of uncertainty. Use your employee network as a source of information.

Ensure your statements and actions align with government requirements and objectives and communicate with the appropriate hierarchy of concern – people first, followed by environment, operations and finance.

Check your supplier base to identify potential impacts or supply chain challenges, reach out to customers to inform them of any risk to them, outline what you are doing to mitigate and manage the challenge, and potentially offer to collaborate in response efforts.

Inform the wider public of what the company is doing in the battle against the coronavirus as appropriate, be aware of dynamics in meeting stakeholder expectations.

Be ready to inform relevant government agencies both at central and local level of efforts in helping combat the coronavirus to demonstrate a proactive and responsible approach, and maintain trust with key external stakeholders.

Planning
Remind your Crisis Management Team or cross-functional team of their roles and responsibilities.

Revisit business continuity plans and build a specific scenario. Make sure you consider organisation-wide comms.

Scenario plan the most likely/severe reputational risks as the situation develops. Develop detailed contingency plans: address public questioning on corporate practice, supply chain disruption, international travel restrictions, and employee(s) sickness.