

Coronavirus: Q&A for British nationals in China

We understand there is considerable concern regarding the spread of coronavirus.

The safety and well-being of British nationals and their dependants is our absolute priority and we will continue to provide updates and essential guidance as the situation develops. To stay updated, please follow us on WeChat @UKConsular and forward our official account card to other British nationals in China. For real-time updates of Foreign and Commonwealth Office travel guidance, subscribe at: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/china>

Essential phone numbers:

In a medical emergency	Dial 120 and ask for an ambulance
24/7 UK Consular Emergency Assistance	(+86) (0) 10 8529 6600 and (+44) (0) 207 008 1500

Health and welfare

Q: Given the recent change in Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) [travel advice](#), should I assume that the risk of infection increased?

A: The current advice from Public Health England and the World Health Organisation is that outside of Wuhan and Hubei, the risk of contracting coronavirus is small, provided basic precautions are followed. You should comply with local restrictions and preventive measures, and monitor developments of the situation via official UK government channels.

Q: Why has the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) changed its travel advice to advise that all British nationals currently in China leave if they are able to?

A: The Chinese government continues to impose restrictions on travel and movement within China. This includes the closure of some highways and inter-city rail and tighter controls on entrance and exit to locations across the country. Some airlines have also suspended flights to and from mainland China. While commercial airlines are still operating, it may become harder to access departure options over the coming weeks. A number of countries have also announced restrictions on entry by travellers from China in response to the coronavirus outbreak. Any British citizens remaining in China who are able to leave China should do so.

For more on leaving China, please see the Leaving China Q&A below.

Q: While in China, what measures should I be taking to protect myself/others?

A: The current advice is to prioritise good hand hygiene. This means washing hands frequently, especially before and after meals and putting on or removing a facemask. You should use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser while outside the home, especially when in public spaces and after touching objects that might spread the virus, such as doorknobs, lift buttons and ATMs. Those with children should encourage regular hand-washing and the use of hand sanitiser. You should limit exposure to potential sources of infection including crowds. When outside the home, local Chinese authorities recommend using a properly-fitted N95 facemask without a ventilator. While advice on the efficacy of facemasks varies between countries and health authorities, you may find it difficult to enter public places, access transportation or even enter your own home unless you are wearing a facemask. Therefore UK guidance is to comply with local regulations and wear a facemask outside the home.

Q: Are certain groups at higher risk than others?

A: People who are elderly or who have underlying or chronic health problems should take additional precautions.

Q: Should I submit to temperature checks where I live or elsewhere?

A: Temperature checks are being implemented in many locations across China, including residential compounds and workplaces, sometimes with no warning. Anyone whose temperature is above what is considered normal (37.3 degrees Celsius/99.14 degrees Fahrenheit) may be reported to the China Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and referred to a state-run fever clinic.

Q: If I fail a temperature check will I be forcibly quarantined; if this happens what support is available?

A: UK officials are unable to intervene in cases where Chinese officials are implementing local policy. If your temperature is identified as being above the threshold for potential fever you are likely to be referred to a Chinese fever clinic. If this happens to you, please notify us on +86 (0)10 8529 6600 or +44 (0) 207 008 1500 at the earliest opportunity.

Q: I or someone close to me is showing symptoms. What should I/they do?

A: In a medical emergency or if someone is displaying severe symptoms such as breathing difficulties, call 120 and ask for an ambulance. This number can connect you to an English-speaking service. If you or a family member are feeling unwell, particularly with symptoms associated with novel coronavirus such as fever or dry cough, immediately go to your nearest designated medical facility. Lists of these facilities, which are often Chinese-language only, are typically posted in public spaces and shared widely on social media. Expatriate WeChat groups can be a valuable source of essential information in English, but you should be mindful of the reliability of the information source.

Q: What are the current recommendations regarding self-quarantine?

A: Self-quarantine means limiting non-essential personal movement outside your home and personal contact with people apart from those you live with. This means anything other than necessary tasks like getting groceries or medical supplies, or seeking necessary medical treatment. If you or someone close to you has been in direct contact with an infected person or someone with flu-like symptoms, or has returned from any province, you should exercise caution and self-quarantine at home for 14 days. If you are returning from Hong Kong, Macao or Taiwan, you should self-quarantine for 7 days. Note that regulations vary from city to city and you should use local channels to monitor restrictions in your area.

Q: When will the outbreak be under control?

A: It is very challenging at this stage to model accurately the spread of a novel infection in a large, diverse country like China. If you choose to remain in China it is recommended you plan for all eventualities.

Remaining in China

Q: I have decided to remain in China. What UK Consular support will I have access to if I run into issues?

A: While you remain in China, the British Embassy in Beijing and British Consulates-General in Shanghai and Guangzhou will – for the immediate future – continue to provide essential travel documentary services to British nationals wishing to leave China. However they will not be able to provide any further consular assistance. The ability of the British Embassy and Consulates to provide face-to-face assistance to British nationals from within China is currently limited, and may continue become even more so. British nationals in China who need consular support should call +86 (0)10 8529 6600 or the FCO in London on +44 (0) 207 008 1500.

Q: I have decided to remain in China. Will this cause any issues if I decide to return back to the UK at some point in the future?

A: The UK is not currently restricting entry from travellers who have visited mainland China during this outbreak, but we keep our guidelines constantly under review in accordance with WHO guidance. While commercial airlines are operating routes from China to the UK at the moment, it may become harder to access departure options over the coming weeks. If you choose to leave China and travel to the UK in the future, you should check quarantine requirements for those entering the UK. Please see details of current quarantine requirements below.

Q: If I choose to remain in China against FCO advice, will this affect my health insurance?

A: This is a matter for individual insurance companies, however many travel insurance policies will not offer coverage to customers who choose to travel or to remain in a region or country against the advice of their government.

Those with insurance choosing to remain in China should check their coverage will not be affected.

Leaving China

Q: I'm currently in Wuhan/Hubei, concerned for my health and welfare and that of my dependants, and wish to leave. Will the UK Government help me to evacuate?

A: There are no current plans for the UK to operate further evacuation flights out of Wuhan. If you are a British national still in Wuhan or Hubei, please call +86 (0)10 8529 6600 or the FCO in London on +44 (0) 207 008 1500 immediately and make yourself known to us. We will do everything we can to support you and keep you informed of evacuation opportunities on flights operated by our international partners.

Q: I am currently in China residing outside Wuhan and Hubei. Should I leave China?

A: Current UK travel advice for British nationals is to leave China, if you are able. The Chinese government continues to impose restrictions on movement within China in response to the coronavirus outbreak. These restrictions include the closure of some provincial highways and inter-city high speed rail, tight control on entry and exit to villages and townships across the country, and restrictions on movement within some cities and municipalities including Chongqing. Some airlines, including British Airways and Virgin Atlantic, have announced a suspension of flights to and from mainland China. Other commercial airlines are still operating, but it may become more difficult to access departure options over the coming weeks.

Q: Will the UK Government help me to evacuate?

A: There are no plans to arrange evacuation flights anywhere in China outside those which have already evacuated British nationals from Wuhan/Hubei Province. British Nationals are advised to check commercial flight options – an indicative list can be found here [link to flights list].

Q: Other countries are blocking arrivals from China? Will the UK?

A: We have no current plans to restrict entry to the UK, but we will keep this constantly under review and follow WHO guidance.

Q: If I want to leave China via commercial means, will I be placed in quarantine in the UK on arrival?

A: No. People arriving from Wuhan and Hubei Province to the UK in the last 14 days should stay indoors and avoid contact with other people as you would with the flu, and call NHS 111 to inform them of your recent travel to the area. This applies even if you do not have symptoms of the virus.

The UK is not taking special measures regarding arrivals of any nationality from China beyond standard entry procedures. However, if you believe you may

have been exposed to coronavirus or been in contact with another person exhibiting flu-like symptoms, you may wish to take precautions and self-quarantine for a minimum 7 days, also informing anyone you might be living with of your concerns.

Q: I wish to leave China via commercial means but I/a dependant does not have a passport. Can I still leave the country?

A: British nationals who currently lack essential documentation should call should call +86 (0)10 8529 6600 or the FCO in London on +44 (0) 207 008 1500 and make UK Consular officials aware of your situation.

Q: I wish to leave China via commercial means but my partner/spouse/child/someone close to me is a Chinese/foreign national and doesn't have a valid visa for the UK. Can they obtain one?

A: UK Visas and Immigration operations in China are currently suspended until further notice. British nationals wishing to leave China with accompanying foreign nationals not in possession of a valid UK visa should call should call +86 (0)10 8529 6600 or the FCO in London on +44 (0) 207 008 1500 and explain your situation to our team.

Q: I am renewing my Chinese visa/residency permit. How can I retrieve my passport from the PSB in order to evacuate?

A: China's visas and immigration services resumed normal operations from Monday 3rd February and the latest information is that processing will continue even if normal working hours are affected by crisis control measures. Please note that processing times may be affected.

Q: I'm a British national outside China and wish to return. Can I?

A: Current Foreign and Commonwealth Office guidance is to avoid all non-essential travel to China, and all travel to Wuhan and Hubei Province, until further notice. There is no official definition of 'non-essential travel', it is up to the individual to make their own decisions based on currently available information.

Q: Is the British Embassy/are Consulate Generals in China currently open?

A: Since 31 January, we have been withdrawing some staff and dependants from the British Embassy and Consulates. Essential staff needed to continue critical work – including consular assistance – will remain. The British Consulates-General in Shanghai and Guangzhou will – for the immediate future – continue to provide essential travel documentary services to British nationals wishing to leave China (but no other consular assistance). The ability of the British Embassy and Consulates to provide face-to-face assistance to British nationals from within China is currently limited, and would be even more limited in the event that the situation deteriorates further. British nationals in China who need consular support should call +86 (0)10 8529 6600 or the FCO in London on +44 (0) 207 008 1500.