

# Health and Geopolitics: China coronavirus aid arrives in Tehran as Iran rebuffs US offers

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- **China coronavirus aid arrives in Tehran as Iran rebuffs US offers**  
**Shipment includes diagnostic tests for disease that has already claimed at least 34 Iranian lives**
- **Chinese foreign minister underlines his country's commitment to help with epidemic prevention and control**

Chinese medical specialists and supplies have arrived in Iran, as the country struggles to contain a coronavirus outbreak that has already infected 388 Iranians, the highest total outside China.

The aid arrived as Iran dismissed offers of help from the United States.

Chinese ambassador to Iran Chang Hua confirmed on his social media account on Saturday that the specialists and a shipment of diagnostic kits had landed in the Iranian capital Tehran.

"The first cargo has entered Iran and further assistance will be sent. Be strong Iran," Chang wrote.

The coronavirus has spread rapidly in Iran, with BBC Persian reporting that the country's real death toll could be six times higher than the official count at the time of 34. Iran said on Saturday that 43 people had died and 593 were infected.

Several high-ranking Iranian officials have also contracted the pneumonia-like virus, including Vice-President for Women's Affairs Masoumeh Ebtekar and deputy health minister Iraj Harirchi.

While Tehran has welcomed support from Beijing, concerns have grown about how strict US sanctions on Iran – intended to limit Tehran's nuclear and military programmes – could affect its response to the disease.

US sanctions against Iran have intensified over the last two months since the US strike on Baghdad that killed top Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told a House Foreign Affairs Committee on Friday that the US had offered to help Iran fight the coronavirus, and that there were avenues for medical and humanitarian goods in Iran.

The US Treasury Department also said on Thursday that it had finalised a deal with the Swiss government to help humanitarian goods flow into Iran.

"We've made offers to the Islamic Republic of Iran to help, and we've made it clear to others around the world and in the region that assistance, humanitarian assistance to push back against the coronavirus in Iran, is something the United States of America fully supports," Pompeo said. But Iran's foreign ministry dismissed the US offers as "ridiculous", according to the Mehr News Agency.

"The claim to help Iran in dealing with the coronavirus from a country who with their economic terrorism has created widespread pressure for the people of Iran and even closed paths for buying medicine and medical equipment is a ridiculous claim and a political-psychological game," foreign ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said.

The virus emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in December and has since spread to more than 60 countries, with most cases in Iran concentrated so far in Tehran and the city of Qom.

Two Chinese people in Ningxia province have been confirmed with the virus after returning from Iran via Moscow and Shanghai.

*Iran's deputy health minister catches coronavirus as outbreak causes shortage of masks and medicine*

On Friday, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi expressed Beijing's support for Tehran in a phone call to his Iranian counterpart, Mohammad Javad Zarif.

Wang also voiced China's commitment to providing help, including cooperation on medical treatment and epidemic prevention and control.

Beijing has maintained a friendly, strategic relationship with Iran in recent years, as it relies heavily on oil purchases from the Middle East. But the tight US sanctions regime against Iran has made Chinese companies warier of doing business there.

Beijing has urged for restraint from all sides and called for a return to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, despite Tehran saying that it would abandon the agreement in January and the US' withdrawal in May 2018.

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**P.S.**

• South China Morning Post? Published: 8:00pm, 29 Feb, 2020:  
<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3053016/china-coronavirus-aid-arrives-tehran-iran-rebuffs-us-offers>

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