

Coronavirus : Chinese police hunt close contacts of silent carriers in locked down Jia county in Henan province

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Authorities urge residents of nearby community to report any meetings with four patients. Pursuit follows attempts by top city officials to reassure public that life will soon get back to normal.

Authorities in the central Chinese province of Henan are pursuing the close contacts of three “silent carriers” of the coronavirus after they put a county under lockdown again to contain the pathogen’s spread.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/3078010/chinese-county-goes-coronavirus-lockdown-country-tries-get-back>

<https://www.scmp.com/coronavirus>

The three asymptomatic patients in Jia county – all doctors at the local hospital – tested positive for the coronavirus on the weekend, raising an immediate red flag that the area may be hit by a new wave of infections. Jia county is home to about 600,000 people and is administered by Pingdingshan.

Authorities are also trying to trace contacts of a fourth person who tested positive after showing some symptoms. The fourth patient, a cleaner from the county who works in Luohe about 100km (60 miles) away, is a friend of one of the doctors and had returned to the county before becoming ill.

In Feixing, a small district in Pingdingshan, a notice issued by the community on Monday called on all residents to report to the authorities immediately if they had been in contact with the four patients. It also called on residents who had been to a specific department store, several restaurants and two estates in the previous 10 days to stay home.

“People who have shown symptoms such as fever and coughing must immediately report to the community,” the notice said.

A Feixing official confirmed on Thursday that the office was keeping a close watch on residents who might have had contact with the doctors.

Asked if the whole city was in lockdown, the official said : *“Only Jia county is under lockdown. If you have a certificate [to certify that you don’t have the coronavirus], you can still come to Pingdingshan.”*

According to Pingdingshan Daily, Pingdingshan Communist Party boss Zhou Bin told a meeting on Tuesday that *“The police department should lead in the epidemic investigation. We should find all close contacts [of the patients].”*

Pingdingshan is a key coal producer in Henan province, and is located just north of Hubei province. The capital of Hubei is Wuhan, the initial epicentre of the pandemic.

Since March, officials in the area have stressed that the epidemic is under control and life will soon get back to normal. Just a week ago, the city’s top leaders visited a restaurant and had dinner –

albeit at separate tables – to try to reassure residents that social distancing measures were being effectively implemented.

But the Jia county infections reported over the weekend cast a shadow over the city's plan to return to normal.

According to the Health Times, a newspaper affiliated with party mouthpiece People's Daily, the three doctors were Liu Guoren, Zhang Huailing and Zhou Lifeng. The fourth patient was only identified by her surname, Wang.

The report said Liu had been to Wuhan but had returned to the county before the Lunar New Year. He had dinner with the two other doctors more than two weeks ago.

An employee at the hospital confirmed on Thursday that the three doctors were being treated for Covid-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus.

The Health Times report said the doctors showed no symptoms but Wang had developed a low fever and begun coughing.

Wang Xinhua, president of Guangzhou Medical University, said that the lockdown measures were justified to stop the spread of new infections.

"Imposing the drastic measures to prevent a second wave of coronavirus infections is correct," Wang Xinhua said. "Of course, it will not be possible to close all cities with asymptomatic patients."

"Generally speaking, tracing and quarantining the close contacts is enough to prevent a second wave [of infections]."

Wang Xinhua said authorities should consider giving nucleic acid tests – one of the baseline tests for Covid-19 – to anybody leaving Hubei.

"Guangzhou has started to test people from Hubei, and this is necessary because we are dealing with the problem of asymptomatic patients. It is one of our most difficult and important tasks," he said.

The coronavirus outbreak, which was first reported in Wuhan in December, has since spread across the globe, infecting almost 1 million people and killing more than 50,000.

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<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/3078192/police-cast-wide-net-close-contacts-silent-coronavirus-carriers>