



Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The COVID-19 resource centre is hosted on Elsevier Connect, the company's public news and information website.

Elsevier hereby grants permission to make all its COVID-19-related research that is available on the COVID-19 resource centre - including this research content - immediately available in PubMed Central and other publicly funded repositories, such as the WHO COVID database with rights for unrestricted research re-use and analyses in any form or by any means with acknowledgement of the original source. These permissions are granted for free by Elsevier for as long as the COVID-19 resource centre remains active.



Letter to the Editor

**Public health lessons from crisis-related travel:
The COVID-19 pandemic**


Dear Editor,

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak that began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 has transformed daily life in nearly every corner of the world. Individuals' schedules have been disrupted by governmental measures to control the virus, such as city- and country-wide lockdowns. Interventions such as physical distancing and contact tracing have been shown to stem the spread of COVID-19. However, it remains challenging to manage residents' and tourists' mobility; globalization has altered approaches to disease control and prevention [1,2].

The manner in which pandemic-related information is presented to the public shapes individual reactions [3] along with organizational decisions. Media coverage about COVID-19 continues to incite public panic, in part due to misinformation [4]. Even so, the virus's spread is undeniable, and pandemic-related travel concerns may affect certain demographics more than others. For example, many universities have shifted to online learning to decrease group contact. The closure of dormitories has forced international students in the U.S. and elsewhere to decide whether to remain in their host country for the duration of the pandemic or travel home to their families [5]. Similarly, many Americans studying abroad have been called back to the U.S. Just as "panic buying" and "hoarding" [6] of various items were common early in the pandemic, panic-induced travel may also affect people's behavior. Individuals are continuing to travel amidst COVID-19 despite restrictions; many are simply desperate to go home.

Domestic or international travel may promote COVID-19 transmission, as individuals can spread the virus even when asymptomatic. Some tourist groups, such as college-aged students, tend to exhibit low risk perceptions of travel-related infectious disease threats [7], which may play a role in transmission as well. Many locations have instituted a mandatory 14-day quarantine as a safeguard: inbound travelers from another state or country must self-isolate upon arriving in their destination to minimize the likelihood of viral transmission. However, not all individuals are abiding by these regulations; those who fail to adhere to guidelines could face fines, jail time, or even deportation. Neglecting safety precautions is only likely to prolong the outbreak and place more people at risk. Targeted risk mitigation strategies, and education efforts, are therefore essential to controlling this and future pandemics.

The scope of the COVID-19 outbreak is unprecedented. Accordingly, governmental and public health officials have limited experience from which to draw in addressing a public health crisis of this scale. The role of tourist mobility in COVID-19 should help epidemiologists and other experts plan for similar outbreaks in the future. Potential interventions could include instituting large-scale travel restrictions and isolation measures earlier in the outbreak trajectory to curb viral spread. International government officials and disease specialists should collaborate to develop awareness campaigns on virus protection and prevention (e.g., COVID-19 vaccination campaigns [8,9]); providing timely, accurate, and consistent information, particularly with the help of effective crisis communication [8,9], can alleviate public distress. Prioritizing investment in public health infrastructure would also help ensure sufficient capacity and supply to promote resident and tourist safety in the event of another global pandemic. By arming the public with reputable knowledge, citizens will be better prepared to make sensible decisions to reduce transmission.

Funding

No funding sources.

Competing interests

None declared.

Ethical approval

Not required.

References

- [1] Zhang XA, Fan H, Qi RZ, Zheng W, Zheng K, Gong JH, et al. Importing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) into China after international air travel. *Travel Med Infect Dis* 2020;101620.
- [2] Wilson ME, Chen LH. Travellers give wings to novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV). *J Travel Med* 2020;27(2):1–3.
- [3] Davis M, Stephenson N, Flowers P. Compliant, complacent or panicked? Investigating the problematisation of the Australian general public in pandemic influenza control. *Soc Sci Med* 2011;72(6):912–8.
- [4] The Lancet. COVID-19: fighting panic with information. *Lancet* 2020;395(10224):537.
- [5] Redden E. International and study abroad students see major disruptions; 2020 [Accessed 9 April 2020] <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/03/20/covid-19-disrupts-international-student-exchange-both-directions>.
- [6] Hall MC, Prayag G, Fieger P, Dyason D. Beyond panic buying: consumption displacement and COVID-19. *J Serv Manag* 2020;32(1):113–28.

- [7] Ma T, Heywood A, MacIntyre CR. Travel health risk perceptions of Chinese international students in Australia—implications for COVID-19. *Infect Dis Health* 2020;25:197–204, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.idh.2020.03.002>.
- [8] Su Zhaohui, Wen Jun, Abbas Jaffar, McDonnell Dean, Cheshmehzangi Ali, Li Xiaoshan, et al. A race for a better understanding of COVID-19 vaccine non-adopters. *Brain, Behavior, & Immunity - Health* 2020;9, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bbih.2020.100159>.
- [9] Su Zhaohui, McDonnell Dean, Wen Jun, Kozak Metin, Abbas Jaffar, Šegalo Sabina, et al. Mental health consequences of COVID-19 media coverage: The need for effective crisis communication practices. *Globalization and Health* 2020. In press.

Jun Wen
*Tourism and Hospitality Management, School of
Business and Law, Edith Cowan University, Perth, WA,
6027, Australia*

Zhaohui Su*
*Center on Smart and Connected Health Technologies,
Mays Cancer Center, School of Nursing, UT Health San
Antonio, San Antonio, TX, 78229, USA*

* Corresponding author at: Center on Smart and
Connected Health Technologies, Mays Cancer
Center, School of Nursing, UT Health San Antonio,
7703 Floyd Curl Drive, San Antonio, TX, 78229, USA.
*E-mail addresses: j.wen@ecu.edu.au (J. Wen),
szh@utexas.edu (Z. Su).*

6 October 2020