

Chinese official says slow response made virus epidemic worse

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China's delayed response to the discovery of a deadly new coronavirus infection worsened the epidemic, the most senior official from the city at the centre of the outbreak said Friday.

More than 210 people have died and nearly 10,000 others have been infected in China by the SARS-like virus and new cases have been found abroad, with more than 20 countries now affected by the disease.

Public anger has simmered on Chinese social media over the handling of the health emergency by [local authorities](#) in Wuhan, where the virus was first detected.

Wuhan officials have been criticised online for withholding information about the infection until the end of last year, despite knowing about the new illness weeks earlier.

"Right now I'm in a state of guilt, remorse and self-reproach," said Ma Guoqiang, the municipal Communist Party secretary for Wuhan.

"If strict control measures had been taken earlier, the result would have been better than now," he told an interview with state broadcaster CCTV.

Wuhan and cities in surrounding Hubei province have been locked down since January 23, with blanket transport restrictions effectively trapping around 56 million people at home.

Ma said the restrictions should have been brought in at least 10 days earlier.

"I think if we had taken measures like this at the time, the epidemic may have been alleviated somewhat, and not got to the current situation."

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