

'No one is allowed out': your stories from the coronavirus outbreak

The outbreak of a new coronavirus is wreaking havoc worldwide. In China, the epicentre of the epidemic, the virus has infected tens of thousands of people and killed some 2,600. Unprecedented measures meant to contain the spread have brought millions of lives to a halt, and the effects have touched economies and global supply chains. The restrictions have also brought challenges to scientists. Some have suspended their usual research to study the coronavirus. Others have had their work or personal lives disrupted by laboratory closures and travel restrictions. In a *Nature* reader poll, more than 600 of you told us that the coronavirus had affected your lives. These are some of your stories.

'People are dying'

Charles C. Y. Xu, McGill University, Montreal, Canada

I was born in Wuhan, China, but I now live in Canada. I learnt about most of what was happening through reading the news, similarly to everyone else. It really hit me that these are real people who are dying when my grandmother started crying as she told me her best friend had passed away after getting COVID-19, within ten days of the first symptoms showing. There were not enough hospital beds, and her son wasn't able to get her admitted in time.

Amphibian breeders thwarted

Amaël Borzée, Nanjing Forestry University, China

I started my lab in China a few months ago, but I was abroad when the number of transmissions surged. The university recommended that I avoid going back until further notice. My students are isolated at home and are unable to start their projects — despite the lab's focus on amphibians and the fact that their breeding season will boom over the next few weeks.

'It's impossible to get a visa'

Anonymous, China

I am from Indonesia, but am now pursuing a PhD at a research institute in China. Before the outbreak happened, I applied for a visa to attend an overseas conference that I won a bursary for. But it's impossible to get a visa now owing to office closures, so I won't get



The deserted streets of Wuhan, China, where the outbreak originated.

to the conference. Many research institutes and universities in China are closed.

In my city, we are on lockdown, and my productivity has hit rock bottom. People don't feel like working; every day, we check the news to follow the number of cases and deaths. It isn't possible to concentrate on work.

'Food is three times the price'

Anonymous, China

No one in our community is allowed to go out, and we must buy food at three times the normal price. People who dare to venture out without permission have been arrested, and face the risk of forced isolation.

'My girlfriend can't go back'

Anonymous, South Korea

My girlfriend is from China and visited me during the Lunar New Year, but she now can't go back because of the outbreak. There are rumours that new research positions in other countries are not hiring candidates from the affected region. That doesn't seem fair at all.

Prejudice on campus

Piotr Rzymiski, Poznan University of Medical Sciences, Poland

I work at a medical university in Poznan, Poland, and we have Asian students who typically wear a face mask between October and March to guard against air pollution and

seasonal flu. Over the past few weeks, I have observed panicked reactions to these students in the city: on the street, on the bus and, sadly, at my university — for example, people deliberately stepping away from them or using tissues when opening doors. This is despite there being no confirmed COVID-19 cases in Poland.

Lab supplies disrupted

Alex Hewitt, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia

My lab's research aims to apply new gene-based therapies for eye diseases that cause blindness. Australia has no centre or facility for commercial DNA synthesis, so gene synthesis for our work is outsourced to a Chinese company, which (appropriately) has diverted resources to help to fight COVID-19. Production delays have stalled our work, and this situation highlights that Australia is vulnerable to disruption of the global supply chain, which could affect its ability to continue contributing to the synthetic-biology revolution.

'We've dropped everything'

Anonymous, Texas

I'm an undergraduate in a mathematical modelling lab, and we've dropped everything to work on COVID.

By Emma Stoye