Gulf screens passengers from China amid virus outbreak

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Dubai International Airport is one of the world's biggest aviation hubs

Gulf airports, including one of the world's biggest aviation hubs, said Thursday they would screen all passengers arriving from China amid the outbreak of a deadly virus.

The move goes further than other major transport hubs in Europe and the United States, which have limited their screening to passengers coming from Wuhan, the city at the centre of the scare.

Dubai airport authorities confirmed that "all passengers arriving on direct flights from the People's Republic of China must receive thermal screening at the gate upon arrival," a statement said.

China has locked down some 20 million people in Wuhan and the neighbouring city of Huanggang to rein in the coronavirus that has already claimed 17 lives and spread to a number of other countries.

Dubai International Airport in 2018 served over 89 million passengers, including more foreign passengers than any other airport worldwide for the fifth year in a row.

Dubai's government said Thursday that some 989,000 Chinese tourists visited the glitzy emirate last year—a number expected to cross the one million mark in 2020.
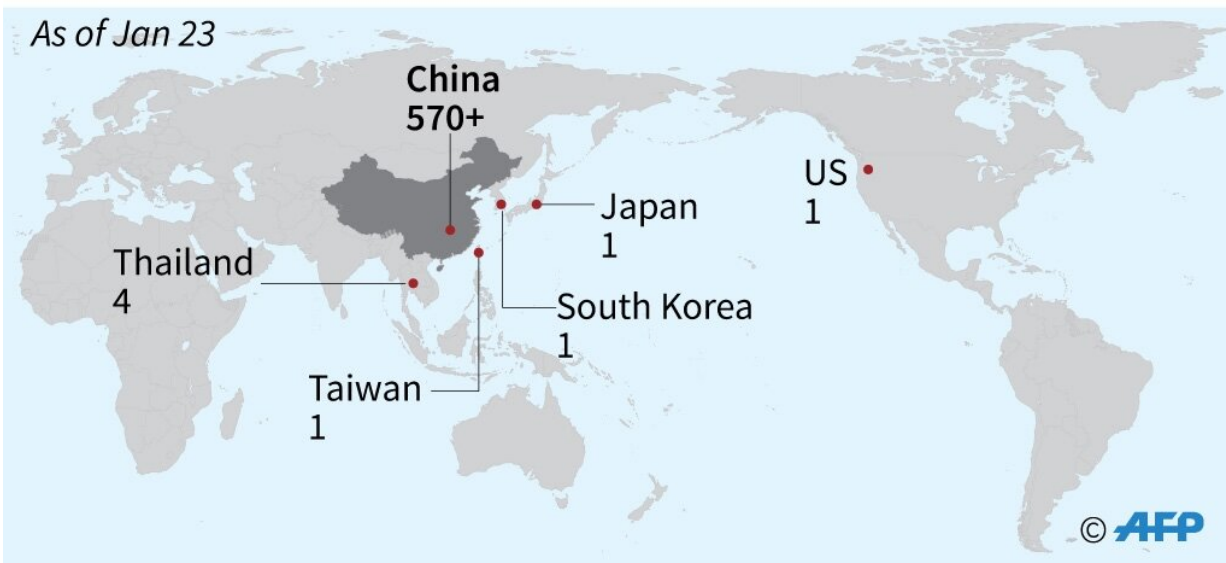
Some 3.6 million Chinese transited through the emirate's main airport in 2019.

"The screening will be conducted on secured, closed gates at the airport by Dubai Health Authority and its Airport Medical Centre team," the statement said.

The coronavirus has caused alarm because of its similarity to SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), which killed nearly 650 people across mainland China and Hong Kong in 2002-2003.

China virus: international cases
Confirmed infections of 2019 nCov

As of Jan 23

China
570+

US
1

Japan
1

Thailand
4

South Korea
1

Taiwan
1

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Several cases of the virus have been confirmed outside China

Like SARS, it can be passed among humans via the respiratory tract.

The UAE's Abu Dhabi International Airport, another major hub, announced on Twitter Thursday that it had also begun screening passengers arriving from China, "in an effort to ensure the health and safety of all of our travelers".

Between them, the two Emirati hubs operate dozens of flights a week with Chinese cities.

China is the UAE's top trading partner and Abu Dhabi is among the 15 top crude oil suppliers to Beijing. Several hundred Chinese companies have offices in the UAE.

Saudi Arabia's pro-government Okaz newspaper reported that the kingdom would also conduct "health assessments" of passengers coming from China.

Shortly after, Kuwait and Bahrain followed suit.

Passengers "coming directly from China will be subject to checks as well as all those coming from countries determined by the health ministry if the virus spreads," a spokesman for Kuwait's Directorate General of Civil Aviation, Saad al-Otaibi, told AFP.

Bahrain's international airport said it would check all passengers arriving at Bahrain International Airport "as a precaution to detect the 'Corona' virus present in China".

The UAE's health ministry said Wednesday that the Gulf state with a population of 10 million, about 90 percent of them foreigners, was free of the coronavirus, and that it had taken sufficient measures to face the disease.

"The health situation poses no grounds for concern and the ministry is closely following up on the situation to ensure the health and safety of everyone," it said.

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