WUHAN, CHINA—The toll from China’s viral epidemic spiked on Monday to 80 dead with hundreds of new infections despite unprecedented quarantines and travel lockdowns, as foreign governments scrambled to help their trapped citizens.

The virulence of a contagion causing fear nationwide has prompted authorities to impose transport curbs around China to cut off transmission routes, and extend a national holiday to delay people traveling back to work.

With many thousands of foreigners trapped in the ground-zero city of Wuhan, which is under a virtual lockdown, the United States and France were among several countries formulating plans to evacuate their citizens by plane.
WHO chief heads to Beijing

With the coronavirus also expanding globally, World Health Organization (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus headed to Beijing to meet with government officials on the crisis.

"My WHO colleagues and I would like to understand the latest developments and strengthen our partnership with China in providing further protection against the outbreak," he said on Twitter.

Tedros last week stopped short of declaring the outbreak an "international public health emergency," which would have prompted more concerted international action, including possible trade or travel restrictions.

Cases have been reported as far afield as France, the United States and Canada, with various countries in Asia also detecting cases. Those infected had previously been in China.

The new additions to China's death toll came entirely from the epicenter province of Hubei, which on Monday reported 24 fresh fatalities.

Most fatalities and overall cases have been in Hubei, and the government says the deaths have largely been elderly or people already weakened by preexisting health conditions.

But China's National Health Commission said on Monday that in addition to 2,744 confirmed infections nationwide—an increase of 769—there were nearly 6,000 suspected cases and more than 30,000 people under medical observation.

Hardest hit has been Hubei's capital Wuhan, where the virus is suspected to have come from animals in a market selling a wide range of exotic wild game.

Wuhan has been under virtual lockdown for days, with transport halted and citizens told to stay at home.

The national government decided it would extend the Lunar New Year holiday and related school closures beyond the original Jan. 30 end date to "reduce population flows," state media reported. The holiday was extended to Feb. 2.

Several cities responded, with new school terms delayed in Beijing until further notice, and Shanghai postponing until Feb. 17.

The city of Suzhou in eastern Jiangsu province also ordered companies to extend the end of the holiday until Feb. 9.

Hundreds of millions of Chinese travel long distances to gather with family members for the holiday, a key concern for authorities struggling to corral the highly contagious pathogen. —APP