



'Don't panic' Says US woman who recovered from coronavirus

AFP, Seattle

An American woman who has recovered from the novel coronavirus has a simple message for people who are worried: Don't panic -- but do think about high-risk individuals and stay home if you feel ill.

Elizabeth Schneider lives in Seattle, the biggest city of Washington state, which has the most deaths in the United States from the disease sweeping the globe.

The 37-year-old, who has a PhD in bioengineering, said she was sharing her story "to give people a little bit of hope" through her own relatively mild experience with the infection, which she treated herself from home.

THE PARTY

Schneider first began experiencing flu-like symptoms on February 25, three days after going to a party that was later identified as the place where at least five other people also got infected.

"I woke up and I was feeling tired, but it was nothing more than what you normally feel when you have to get up and go to work, and I had been very busy the previous weekend," she told AFP in an interview Wednesday.

Schneider found she had a high temperature, which peaked at 103 degrees Fahrenheit that night (39.4 Celsius).

She turned to over-the-counter flu medications to treat the symptoms and the fever began to recede in the coming days.

'PLEASANTLY SURPRISED'

A few days later, however, she discovered through a friend's Facebook post that several people from the party had all developed similar symptoms.

She decided to enroll in a research program called the Seattle Flu Study, hoping it might provide an answer. The team behind the study sent her a nasal swab kit, which she mailed back and waited several more days.

"I finally got a phone call from one of the research coordinators on Saturday (March 7), telling me that 'You have tested positive for COVID-19,'" she said.

By this time, her symptoms had already subsided, and she was told by local health authorities to remain at home for at least seven days after the onset of symptoms or 72 hours after they subsided.

Schneider said she hoped her example, which will probably be typical of the high majority of cases, could comfort others. "The message is don't panic," said Schneider.

Pandemic to be 'over by June' if nations act

Says senior medical adviser as China claims peak of epidemic passed

REUTERS, Beijing

The global coronavirus pandemic could be over by June if countries mobilise to fight it, Beijing's senior medical officer said yesterday, as China declared the peak had passed there and new cases in Hubei fell to single digits for the first time.

Around two-thirds of global cases of the coronavirus have been recorded in China's central Hubei province, where the virus first emerged in December. But in recent weeks the vast majority of new cases have been outside China.

Chinese authorities credit strict measures they have taken, including placing Hubei under near total lockdown, with preventing big outbreaks in other cities, and say other countries should learn from their efforts.

"Broadly speaking, the peak of the epidemic has passed for China," said Mi Feng, a spokesman for the National Health Commission. "The increase of new cases is falling."

Zhong Nanshan, the Chinese government's senior medical adviser, said at a news conference yesterday that as long as countries take the outbreak seriously and are prepared to take firm measures, it could be over worldwide

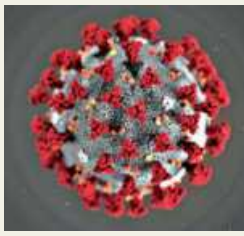
in a matter of months.

"My advice is calling for all countries to follow WHO instructions and intervene on a national scale," he said. "If all countries could get mobilised, it could be over by June."

Zhong, an 83-year-old epidemiologist renowned for helping combat the Sars outbreak

Virus epicentre logs single-digit cases for first time

Cases imported from abroad now new challenge



in 2003, said viruses in the same family typically become less active in warm months, which could help slow the spread.

"My estimate of June is based on scenarios that all countries take positive measures. But if some countries do not treat the infectiousness and harmfulness seriously, and intervene

strongly, it would last longer."

With the marked slowdown of the spread of the virus in China, more businesses have reopened, with authorities cautiously easing strict containment measures.

Hubei province announced yesterday a further loosening of travel restrictions and will also allow some industries to resume production in two of its cities and two counties.

While the virus is spreading quickly globally, its progress in China has slowed markedly in the past seven days. In all, 15 new cases were recorded in mainland China on Wednesday, down from 24 the day before. Seven of the new cases were outside Hubei, including six imported from abroad.

While only 85 of the cases in China have come from abroad, the rising number of such incidences has prompted authorities to shift their focus on containing the risk of imported cases.

The total number of cases recorded in mainland China was 80,793. As of Tuesday, 62,793 people had recovered and been discharged from hospital, or nearly 80 percent of the infections.



Members of Sofia's Municipality disinfect the biggest market for Chinese goods in Sofia, Bulgaria to prevent the spread of novel coronavirus yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



Tom Hanks, wife test positive for coronavirus

Oscar-winning actor Tom Hanks and his wife, actress Rita Wilson, have both tested positive for coronavirus in Australia, the actor said on Twitter. Hanks said that he and Wilson, both 63, were tested in Australia, where he is working on a film, after they felt tired and achy with slight fevers. "To play things right, as is needed in the world right now, we were tested for the coronavirus and were found to be positive," Hanks said in the tweet. The film star said that he and Wilson would be "tested, observed and isolated" for as long as required. The couple are the first major US celebrities known to have contracted COVID-19. The coronavirus has infected more than 1,000 people in the United States. "Not much more to it than a one-day-at-a-time approach, no? We'll keep the world posted and updated," Hanks tweeted.

Spain gov't tested as minister infected

Spain's government underwent coronavirus testing yesterday after a minister tested positive and was quarantined with her partner, deputy prime minister Pablo Iglesias, and cases soared close to 3,000. The surge in infections brought the total to 2,968 cases in Spain up from 2,140 on Wednesday evening, with deaths leaping to 84 from 48 within the same time frame. "This morning, all members of the government will undergo testing," a government statement said, indicating the results would be published later in the day. "The minister (Irene Montero) is in a good condition and second deputy prime minister Pablo Iglesias is also in quarantine due to the situation." Montero tested positive on Wednesday evening, three days after appearing at a mass march of some 120,000 people through Madrid for International Women's Day.



Thunberg urges activists to avoid mass climate protests

Greta Thunberg has urged climate campaigners to avoid mass protests as the new coronavirus spreads, but said her "Fridays for Future" movement would organise online strikes instead. The Swedish activist warned her followers it was vital they listened to the advice of health experts who have advised people to avoid large public gatherings to slow down the spread of the virus which has infected more than 125,000 people worldwide. "We young people are the least affected by this virus but it's essential that we act in solidarity with the most vulnerable and that we act in the best interest of our common society," she said on Twitter Wednesday.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



Sanders to remain in race

Bernie Sanders on Wednesday shrugged off a string of primary defeats and pressure to drop out of the race for the Democratic presidential nomination, saying he remains in the fight against centrist frontrunner Joe Biden. In his first remarks since losing to Biden in Michigan, Missouri, Mississippi and Idaho on Tuesday, the leftist senator from Vermont said his main priority was defeating "dangerous" President Donald Trump. He acknowledged, however, in a brief, passionate speech that many Democrats see him as less electable than the 77-year-old former vice president -- perhaps preparing the ground for his eventual exit. Biden now has about 860 delegates to Sanders' 710, and looks set to reach the 1,991 needed to be declared the party standard bearer at the Democratic convention in Milwaukee in July. The next primaries are on March 11 in Arizona, Florida, Illinois and Ohio.

US lawmakers seek Xinjiang import ban over forced labor

Lawmakers in Washington have proposed a ban on most imports from China's Xinjiang region, charging that goods produced by Uighur forced laborers were easily making their way into the United States. The US already bans products made through slavery, but with rights groups saying as many as one million Uighurs and other minorities are held in camps in Xinjiang, lawmakers said forced labor was interwoven into the region's economy. Uighur activists say that China is conducting a massive brainwashing campaign in internment camps aimed at eradicating their culture. Beijing says the camps are "vocational education centers" teaching Mandarin and job skills to steer "students" away from religious extremism.

Far-right terrorism 'biggest threat' to German democracy

Far-right terrorism and extremism are the biggest danger facing democracy in Germany today, the domestic intelligence agency chief said yesterday, after the country was hit by several extremist attacks in recent months. The most radical right-wingers number 32,000 in the country, said BfV chief Thomas Haldenwang, adding that 13,000 are considered potentially violent. His agency also placed under formal surveillance the far-right AfD party's most radical faction Fluegel (The Wing) which now has about 7,000 members. Founded in 2013, the AfD has grown and shifted further right over the last seven years. Railing against Chancellor Angela Merkel's decision in 2015 to keep Germany's borders open to refugees, the AfD has scooped up a significant number of votes from those unhappy with the government's migration policy.

SOURCE: AFP

Will warmer weather slow pandemic?

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

As the coronavirus outbreak continues to cause jitters with surging cases and deaths worldwide, reports have emerged quoting medical experts saying the warmer spring and summer weather may bring some relief by slowing down the spread of the infection.

Dr Stefan Baral, an epidemiology expert at Johns Hopkins University, was quoted by the Boston Herald as saying he expects "a natural decrease" of the disease as the United States moves into warmer weather.

AccuWeather, the US-based forecaster, quoted Dr John Nicholls, a pathology professor at the University of Hong Kong, saying there are three things coronavirus does not like: sunlight, temperature and humidity.

"Sunlight will cut the virus's ability to grow in half, so the half-life will be 2.5 minutes, and in the dark it's about 13 to 20 [minutes]. Sunlight is really good at killing viruses," Nicholls said.

Deutsche Welle also cited Thomas Pietschmann, a virologist from Germany's Centre for Experimental and Clinical Infection Research, who said the coronavirus is "not very heat-resistant, which means that the virus quickly breaks down when temperatures rise".

According to AccuWeather, spring will arrive in the US on March 19, while Climate-Data.

org is predicting that temperatures in the Italian capital of Rome will climb to 16C-17C (60.8-62.6F), when the spring equinox arrives in Europe on March 20. Nowruz, the Persian new year that typically marks the start of springtime, is expected on March 20 in Iran.

Meanwhile, in countries in or close to the southern hemisphere, daytime temperatures between 30C (80F) in Jakarta, Indonesia, to 35C (95F) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, are expected during the same period.

While health experts agree warmer weather is a factor in containing the outbreak, they stress the outcome of each country's response may depend on how robust its healthcare infrastructure is, how quickly those tools are deployed, and how proactive citizens are.

They also said there are other crucial variables to consider in fighting the infection, warning that simply relying on weather patterns without observing safety precautions and other health protocols invites risk.

Even as the weather warms up in the northern hemisphere, the coronavirus may still survive for days at temperatures up to 25C (77 F), according to a study in Germany published by the Journal of Hospital Infection.

The study showed a human coronavirus could persist for five days in 21C (69.8 F) temperature on a Teflon, ceramic or steel surface.

Dr Edsel Maurice Salvana, director at the Institute of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology at the University of the Philippines, told Al Jazeera that a direct correlation between warmer countries and the slower spread of the virus "is a myth".

"It might deactivate the virus faster if it is in on surfaces, but it won't affect people who get sick from inhaling droplets from someone's cough or sneeze," said Salvana, who is also an adjunct professor for Global Health at the University of Pittsburgh in the US.

Meanwhile, Dr Abdul Ghafur, an infectious disease specialist based in the Indian city of Chennai, said heat and humidity in the country "could be one of the reasons" why coronavirus is not spreading faster in India, as the weather limits the virus from travelling "longer or faster".

"It is not just the temperature that is killing in the warm climate, it is the humidity as well. The humidity reduces the transferability of the virus," he told Al Jazeera.

As the temperature is rising in northern hemisphere, Ghafur said he does not expect the coronavirus "to go away completely".

"It may become endemic at least in a few countries," he warned, adding countries with better healthcare systems may be able to contain the outbreak faster.

Syria strike kills 26 Iraqi fighters

AFP, Beirut

An air strike killed 26 fighters of Iraqi paramilitary group Hashed al-Shaabi in eastern Syria after a deadly attack on US-led coalition troops in Iraq, a war monitor said yesterday.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the Wednesday strike was probably carried out by the coalition.

But the anti-jihadist alliance denied having carried out any raids in Syria or neighbouring Iraq on Wednesday night.

Before the strike near the border town of Albu Kamal, rockets were fired at a military base north of Baghdad hosting coalition troops, killing two Americans and one Briton.



People use a bulldozer to pull out an inundated car from a flooded street in the New Cairo suburb of the Egyptian capital yesterday amidst a heavy rain storm.

PHOTO: AFP



US Congress votes to limit Trump's war power on Iran

AFP, Washington

The US Congress on Wednesday gave its final approval to a bid to restrain President Donald Trump from attacking Iran, a sign of lawmakers' alarm after soaring tensions.

A month after the resolution cleared the key hurdle of the Senate, which is controlled by Trump's Republican Party, the Democratic-led House of Representatives voted 227-186 to approve the measure that bars any military action against Iran without an explicit vote from Congress.

But the resolution is virtually certain to be vetoed by Trump, and the coalition of most Democrats and a handful of war-skeptic Republicans lacks the votes to override him.

"If President Trump is serious about his promise to stop endless wars, he will sign this resolution into law," said Senator Tim Kaine, the Democrat who spearheaded the move.

The House voted moments after a rocket fired on a military base north of Baghdad killed an American soldier, a British soldier and a US contractor, in the deadliest such attack on foreign forces in Iraq in several years.

A similar attack in December that killed a US contractor set off a chain of escalation after the United States blamed it on Iranian-aligned Iraqi Shia militias.

On January 31, Trump ordered a drone strike that killed Iran's most powerful general, Qassem Soleimani, at the Baghdad airport.