

Chinese Government Finally Acknowledges Underreporting Coronavirus Cases

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A top Chinese health official said Wednesday that the government will begin counting coronavirus patients without symptoms in its official tally of cases of the virus, in what is a tacit acknowledgement that Beijing has underreported data on the pandemic.

China's National Health Commission [disclosed](#) that the government is monitoring 1,541 people who have tested positive for coronavirus but have no symptoms.

Chang Jile, the head of the health agency, said at a press conference in Wuhan that the government will start reporting asymptomatic patient numbers Wednesday.

"From April 1, we will publish reports, outcomes and management of asymptomatic people in daily epidemic notifications, and respond to social concerns in a timely manner," Jile said, [according to CCTV](#).

Jile's statement is the first time that the government has officially acknowledged that it has undercounted patients.

China's official tally has hovered just above 80,000 cases for several weeks, while countries around the globe have seen their case numbers explode. The United States had reported more than 160,000 positive cases as of Tuesday. **[\(RELATED: China's Propaganda Machine Loves WHO Official Bruce Aylward\)](#)**

Analysts outside China have speculated for weeks that the communist regime has [underreported its case load](#). The government quarantines asymptomatic patients, and adds them to the official case tally if they begin showing signs of disease, [according to Caixin Global](#), an independent news outlet in China.



World Health Organization director general Tedros Adhanom (L) shakes hands with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing on January 28, 2020. (NAOHKO HATTA/AFP/Getty Images)

The South China Morning Post, a Hong Kong–based outlet, [reported](#) March 22 that Beijing failed to record more than 43,000 positive tests for so-called “silent carriers,” or asymptomatic patients.

There have also been [anecdotal reports](#) that the government is reporting the number of fatalities from coronavirus. Chinese officials have reported just over 3,300 deaths since the virus emerged out of Wuhan in November 2019. Residents of the city have said that they’ve seen a surge in urns outside of funeral homes in the metropolis.

Determining the prevalence of asymptomatic cases is key to shaping health officials’ strategy to respond to the coronavirus pandemic. If coronavirus was transmitted mainly by patients who show symptoms, those patients could more easily be isolated in order to prevent transmission, making it easier to slow the pandemic. But if the virus is easily transmitted by people who do not know they are infected, the pandemic becomes harder to contain.

Epidemiologists are increasingly confident that asymptomatic patients play a key role in spreading coronavirus.

“We now know that asymptomatic transmission likely [plays] an important role in spreading this virus,” Dr. Michael Osterholm, the director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, [told CNN](#).

Osterholm told the network that asymptomatic transmission “surely can fuel a

pandemic like this in a way that's going to make it very difficult to control.”

U.S. and international health officials early on in the pandemic cited China's data to conclude that coronavirus was likely not spread by asymptomatic carriers.

Dr. Bruce Aylward, who led a fact-finding mission to China last month, insisted in [multiple statements](#) that it did not appear as if coronavirus was being transmitted by asymptomatic carriers. The absence of asymptomatic cases led Aylward to tout Beijing's draconian crackdown in Wuhan and other provinces to stop the spread of the virus.

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