

Coronavirus, Discrimination and IRCC Special Measures

In the past few weeks, we have been inundated by news and other articles related to the coronavirus disease which started in Wuhan, Hubei Province in China and which has infected more than 45,000 and killed more than 1,000 people to date. In Canada, there were only a handful of persons who were confirmed to have contracted the disease (4 in BC and 3 in Ontario). Thankfully, all confirmed cases in Canada are on their way to recovery and there are no signs that the disease is spreading as rapidly as it is in Hubei province and surrounding areas in China.

Nonetheless, the relatively low number of affected cases in Canada had not prevented the spread of misleading information and/or discriminatory treatment of people who are from China or who are at least perceived to be Chinese. In fact, many Filipinos with perceived ‘Chinese physical features’ have also reportedly been the subject of discriminatory practices arising from the coronavirus outbreak.

It is clearly unjust to shun all Chinese people or to avoid all Chinese establishments for fear that they will pass on the coronavirus simply by virtue of their being Chinese. This type of thinking and attitude is not only discriminatory but also exhibit a careless disregard for others. It ignores the reality that the Chinese people are in fact hardest hit by this disease and are thus the ones who need most of our help and compassion.

As in most everything else, ignorance often breeds contempt and undue panic or fear. Hence, the best way to protect ourselves from the virus is to learn more about its nature, how it is transmitted and what we can do to prevent contracting the same.

In coordination with the World Health Organization and the rest of the world, we are thankful that Canada is doing its part to find solutions to this medical pandemic and in protecting Canadians and all other people worldwide from this disease.

Aside from sending back Canadians and permanent residents who were trapped in the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak, the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) had recently introduced special measures aimed at helping others who have been or will be affected by this health emergency.

Since Canadian visa offices in China are operating with essential staff and 11 visa application centres in mainland China have been closed temporarily, the IRCC had announced the following temporary measures effective 7 February 2020 and until further notice (as published in the IRCC website):

Permanent Residents

“Permanent resident visa holders will be able to request an extension of their Confirmation of Permanent Residence (COPR) if

- they have been approved for immigration to Canada and have a COPR
- their visa will expire within the next 90 days
- they are unable to travel to Canada

Applicants will need to contact IRCC by submitting a [web form](#) and explaining the reason they are unable to travel to Canada within the validity of their visa. These requests will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Permanent residents who need a **permanent resident travel document** to urgently travel to Canada can email the Canadian visa office in China at beijing-immigration@international.gc.ca.”

Canadian Citizens

“Those who are scheduled to take the **Oath of Citizenship**, but are unable to travel to Canada, will not miss the opportunity to attend a ceremony. They will be rescheduled for a later date.”

Temporary Resident or Permanent Resident Applicants Abroad

“Applicants who have an urgent case, or who need to urgently travel to Canada, can email the Canadian visa office in China at beijing-immigration@international.gc.ca for assistance. People who have applied for a visitor visa, a work permit, a study permit or for permanent residence, but who cannot complete the next steps in the process on time due to the situation in mainland China, will not have their application refused solely on the basis of not completing these requests.

Examples of the next steps include

- submitting their passport or supporting documents, such as a police certificate
- completing an immigration medical examination
- giving their biometrics

More time (extensions) will automatically be provided to applicants in these situations. Once it is possible to provide these required documents, applicants are encouraged to do so as soon as possible to avoid further delays.

Those affected by the travel restrictions and who want to withdraw their temporary residence application must complete a [web form](#). Refunds will be provided to people who withdraw their application within 24 hours of submitting, provided no processing has started.”

Temporary Residents (Visitors, Students or Workers) Unable to Leave Canada

“Visitors, international students and foreign workers whose legal status in Canada will soon end, but cannot travel to mainland China due to travel restrictions, can apply for an extension, if eligible.

People whose legal status in Canada has expired may be able to restore their status or apply for a temporary resident permit.”

As always, this article is meant for information purposes only and not as specific legal advice.

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