

Coronavirus ban sees students head for third countries to see out quarantine period

By Jason Fang and Iris Zhao

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PHOTO: Coco, who went back to China for a holiday, is now worried about her visa, which will soon expire. (Supplied)

International university students from China say they are transiting to third countries to wait out their quarantine period before flying to Australia to resume their classes.

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment issued advice earlier this week on how students "may" be able to get back to Australia via a third country and provided examples.

"A student leaves mainland China on 3 Feb 2020 and goes to Malaysia. Provided the student does not return to mainland China they could enter Australia on 17 Feb 2020," one example said.

The specific examples have since been removed from the department's website.

In a statement issued on Monday, the department advised the ABC: "As at the 10th of February 2020, students who have been in another country other than mainland China for the last 14 days may be able to enter Australia provided the student does not return to China on the way to Australia."

Prime Minister Scott Morrison also posted on Chinese social media platform WeChat on the weekend reminding students who already had visas that they remained valid and would only be cancelled "if the student attempts to travel to Australia and it is determined that the person has been to mainland China from 1 February 2020".

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Key Points:

- After a 14-day stay in a country other than mainland China, international students are likely able to get around a travel ban
 - A migration agent said he was aware of many students taking this approach
 - Australia currently has a ban on most travellers from China
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What you need to know

On February 1, the Federal Government announced a ban on anyone arriving from, or transiting through, mainland China from coming to Australia, unless they had been outside China for 14 days.

The ban excluded Australian citizens, permanent residents and immediate family members.

Students from China told the ABC how they were now attempting to get back to Australia in time for classes.



Here's a rundown of all the facts about coronavirus, and how you can make sure you're protected.



PHOTO: Student visa holder Kegong Zhong was about to fly back to Australia when the ban was announced. (Supplied)

Alan Zheng left China for Bangkok on February 5 and said he was planning to come back to Australia after 14 days in Thailand.

"If any other problem comes up later, I will fly to Nairobi," he said.

"My father works in Nairobi. I can join him for a month before coming back to Australia."

With the start of the new university year only weeks away, just over half of Australia's 189,000 Chinese international students were still offshore, Education Minister Dan Tehan said last week.

Migration agent Sean Dong told the ABC that many international students in his WeChat groups were trying to come to Australia through a third country.

"Many don't want to miss the start of the term," Mr Dong said.

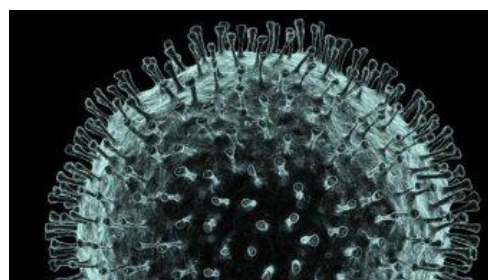
Coco, a Chinese international student who had gone back to Gansu province, north-west China, for a holiday said she was desperate to get back before her current visa expired.

"If I can't go back to Australia [before my student visa ends], my application for a graduate work visa will be affected," she said.

"A lot of problems are coming along. I didn't expect that I am not able to go back. I'm still paying rent for my room. It's a huge burden."

Kegong Zhong recently graduated from the University of Melbourne and was about to head back to Australia when the ban was announced.

From Wuhan to Australia



The deadly coronavirus is spreading across the globe, with no end in sight — here is a timeline of key events so far and what to expect next.

"This has a great impact on me. My student visa expires in mid-March. I originally wanted to enter the country in February so I can submit my application for a work visa in early March," Mr Zhong told the ABC.

He said he was not considering coming back via a third country.

"I heard the news about the third country transfer, but I will not consider it ... this also has great risks.

"I may not be able to travel smoothly from China to a third country. There is also a great risk of infection during the travel process."

Coronavirus fears in Thailand

Aaron Yan, who is on a working holiday visa and was in the process of applying for a student visa, said he had also flown to Thailand and would try to get back into Australia on February 23.

"If I get denied, I'll return to Thailand or go to another country for a few days before trying to come back again," he said.

While in Thailand, Mr Yan said he planned to spend most of his time in his hotel room preparing for an English language exam.

"I'm not sightseeing anywhere. Nowhere is safe," he said.

"I go out of the room only for food, and with a mask on. Under the current situation, I think it's better to stay in the hotel."

Mr Zheng said he had similar fears about the risks of being in Thailand.

"I see more and more Chinese arriving and not all of them wear masks," he said.

"All the rooms nearby in my hotel have been taken by Chinese guests. I didn't dare to go out. Also, I don't have many masks left with me."

Meanwhile, some experts have warned that travel bans can actually backfire in the effort to combat the spread of the disease.

"All of the evidence we have indicates that travel restrictions and quarantines directed at individual countries are unlikely to keep the virus out of our borders," Jennifer Nuzzo, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, said of the US travel ban, according to CNN.

"These measures may exacerbate the epidemic's social and economic tolls."

Coronavirus has sparked racist attacks — including on me



With 10,000 confirmed cases of coronavirus and more than 200 deaths, as of Friday, it's no wonder many people feel anxious about the spread of the disease and the risk of infection. But a new threat is emerging: racism.

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