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Inside C2

Sunday, November 21 2021

China tennis player Peng will reappear in public 'soon' - Global Times editor

BEIJING, Nov 20 (Reuters) - Chinese tennis player Peng Shuai has been staying at home "freely" and will make a public appearance "soon", Global Times editor-in-chief Hu Xijin, a prominent state-media journalist, said on Saturday.

Former doubles world number one Peng has not been seen or heard from publicly since she said on Chinese social media on Nov. 2 that former vice-premier Zhang Gaoli coerced her into sex and they later had an on-off consensual relationship. Neither Zhang nor the Chinese government have commented on her allegation. Peng's social media post was quickly deleted and the topic has been blocked from discussion on China's heavily censored internet.

"In the past few days, she stayed in her own home freely and she didn't want to be disturbed. She will show up in public and participate in some activities soon," Hu wrote on Twitter.

The Global Times is published by the People's Daily, the official newspaper of China's ruling Communist Party.

Hu said he had confirmed through his sources that photos shared on Twitter by a journalist working for Chinese state media, purportedly showing Peng at home, depicted her "current state".

He also posted a video later on Saturday that appeared to show Peng at a restaurant.

Reuters was not able to verify the authenticity of the pictures or video independently.

"I am glad to see the videos released by China state-run media that appear to show Peng Shuai at a restaurant in Beijing," Women's Tennis Association (WTA) chairman Steve Simon said in a statement.

"While it is positive to see her, it remains unclear if she is free and able to make decisions and take actions on her own, without coercion or external interference. This video alone is insufficient.

"As I have stated from the beginning, I remain concerned about Peng Shuai's health and safety and that the allegation of sexual assault is being censored and swept under the rug. I have been clear about what needs to happen and our relationship with China is at a crossroads."

Peng Shuai of China gestures in her match against Kateryna Bondarenko of Ukraine at the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne January 18, 2011. REUTERS/Tim Wimborne/File Photo

GROWING CONCERN

Amid growing concern about her whereabouts, the WTA has threatened to pull tournaments out of China and the men's ATP has demanded clarity from the Chinese authorities. The United States has called for proof of Peng's whereabouts and safety.

The International Olympic Committee could be pushed into taking a hard line with the 2022 Beijing Olympic hosts, senior IOC member Dick Pound has told Reuters.

Thus far the IOC has declined to comment, saying it believed "quiet diplomacy" offered the best opportunity for a solution.

The IOC's Athletes Commission, made up of athletes elected by their peers, said it was "very concerned" for Peng and hoped contact with her and fellow athletes could be established soon. read more

Wimbledon organisers the All England Lawn Tennis Club said in a statement: "We are united with the rest of tennis in the need to understand that Peng Shuai is safe. We have been working in support of the WTA's efforts to establish her safety through our relationships behind the scenes."

I am connected to all players. I hope good news will come soon from her."

Swiss tennis great Roger Federer also joined the chorus of athletes expressing concern for Peng.

"She was the number one (doubles player) in the world, but regardless of that I hope she is well," Federer told Sky Sports Italy.

"The whole tennis family is with her.

Spanish tennis player Rafa Nadal also said he was following the situation closely.

"I follow the news and read about Peng Shuai," Nadal told L'Equipe. "Even if I don't have all the information, the most important thing is to know if she is OK. All of us from the tennis family are hoping to see her back with us soon."

Tesla app coming back online after server outage, Musk says

Nov 19 (Reuters) - Tesla Inc (TSLA.O) chief Elon Musk said on Friday that the company's mobile application was coming back online after an app server outage earlier prevented many owners from connecting to their cars.

Musk was responding to a Tesla owner's tweet, who said that he was experiencing a "500 server error" to connect his Model 3 through the iOS app in Seoul, South Korea.

"Should be coming back online now. Looks like we may have accidentally increased verbosity of network traffic," Musk said.

The outage was first reported by Electrek.

About 500 users reported they faced an error at around 4:40 p.m. ET (2140 GMT), according to outage monitoring website Downdetector, which tracks outages by collating status reports from a series of sources, including user-submitted errors on its platform. There were just over 60 reports at around 9:20 p.m. ET.

"Apologies, we will take measures to ensure this doesn't happen again," Musk said.

WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

CORONAVIRUS DIARY 11/20/2021

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China And U.S. Ease Restrictions On Journalists' Visas

The U.S. and China agreed to ease restrictions on foreign journalists operating in the two countries. Last year China expelled some American reporters during the Trump administration.

Under the agreement, three American news organizations including the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post will be able to go back to China, but it is not clear whether specific reporters will be permitted to return to work there.

Earlier the U.S. had limited visas for Chinese reporters to 90 days, but they will now be renewed annually. Both sides agreed to allow reporters to come and go from countries without fear of losing the ability to return to work. Reporters for both countries will have to meet the standard eligibility requirement for visas under the laws of both countries.

This is a good sign for resolving some of the escalating tensions between the two countries. It also signals that the people will get more news and information from the news media.

We have to admit that China has now become a superpower. As a G2 member in the world, they have opened the door for American banks in July. Citigroup became the first foreign bank to win approval to open a custody business in China. JPMorgan Chase got permission from China to take full ownership of its investment banking and trading business there.

Today we need to have more good news reported to the people in both countries.

We are very happy that American reporters are going back to China. We want them to write more stories about the people's stories to let the American people understand the Chinese better.

We now need a better future for the whole world.

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

Editor's Choice

Tanya McLean, aunt of Jacob Blake, reacts to the verdict in the trial of Kyle Rittenhouse, outside the Kenosha County Courthouse in Kenosha, November 19. REUTERS/Evelyn Hockstein

A man holds a placard as he protests again the verdict in Kenosha, November 19. REUTERS/Evelyn Hockstein

A woman stands behind a car with shattered glass near the scene of a shooting at the Boise Towne Square shopping mall in Boise, Idaho. REUTERS/Shannon Stapleton

Hannah Gittings, girlfriend of victim Anthony Huber, is embraced as she speaks to the media after the verdict, November 19. REUTERS/Evelyn Hockstein

Fishermen throw a bottle of beer during the traditional carp haul near the town of Blatna, Czech Republic. REUTERS/David W Cerny

Supporters of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange protest outside the Royal Courts of Justice in London, Britain. REUTERS/Henry Nicholls

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

BUSINESS

Is The Pandemic Ending?

How And When Will The Pandemic End? A Top Virologist Says, "Never."

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Assuming no new super-spreading variants of SARS-CoV-2 arise and that vaccine uptake is high among 5-to-11-year-olds when the vaccine is available to them, modelers project that COVID-19 cases and deaths may steadily decline over the coming months. (Photo Credit/Towfiqu Barbhuiya, Unsplash. All Rights Reserved.)

Key Points

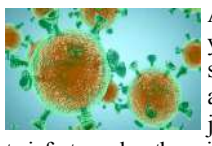
We may be approaching a saturation point in terms of coronavirus infections in some of the worst-hit countries.
Eventually, the virus will run out of people to infect.
But there are still many unknowns when it comes to this virus.

***(*Editor's Note:** The interview below is with Belgian virologist **Guido Vanham**, the former head of virology at the Institute for Tropical Medicine in Antwerp, Belgium, and he was asked: **how will this pandemic end? And on which factors might that depend?**)*

How will this pandemic end?

Guido Vanham (GV): It will probably never end, in the sense that this virus is clearly here to stay unless we eradicate it. And the only way to eradicate such a virus would be with a very effective vaccine that is delivered to every human being. We have done that with smallpox, but that's the only example - and that has taken many years. So it will most probably stay. It belongs to a family of viruses that we know - the coronaviruses - and one of the questions now is whether it will behave like those other viruses.

It may reappear seasonally - more in the winter, spring and autumn and less in the early summer. So we will see whether that will have an impact. But at some point in this epidemic - and certainly in the countries that are most affected, like Italy and Spain - there will be saturation, because according to predictions, up to 40% percent of the Spanish and 26% of the Italian population are or have been infected already.



And, of course, when you go over 50% or so, even without doing anything else, the virus just has fewer people to infect - and so the epidemic will come down naturally. And that's what happened in in all the previous epidemics when we didn't have any [treatments]. The rate of infection and the number of those susceptible will determine when that happens.

What are some of the factors at play? What do we know, and what don't we know?

GV: The first thing we know, of course, is that it's a very infectious virus - that's probably something that every inhabitant of the world knows. But what is not known is the infectious dose - how many viruses you need to produce an infection - and that will be very difficult to know unless we perform experimental infections.

And we know people develop antibodies. That has been clearly shown in China, but we are not yet sure how protective these antibodies are. There is no convincing evidence yet that people who have recovered get ill again after a few days or weeks - so most probably, the antibodies are at least partially protective. But how long will that protection last for - is it a matter of months or years? The epidemiology in the future will depend on that - on the level of protective immunity that you get at the population level after this wave of infections, which we cannot really stop. We can mitigate it, we can flatten the curve, but we cannot really stop it because at some point we will have to come out of our houses again and go to work and school. Nobody really knows when that will be.

The virus will take its course and there will be a certain level of immunity - but the answer to how long that will last will determine the periodicity and the amplitude of the epidemics to come. Unless, of course, we find a way to block it in a year or so from now with an effective vaccine.

There is also an unresolved question about what determines an individual's susceptibility to this disease. Of course, there is age, but that's not so surprising. People's immune systems weaken with age. But then there is this concept of co-morbidities, which means that some people, even younger people, get ill because they have other diseases. It's logical that when you have cancer or diabetes, that you are more susceptible to infections. But what is remarkable - what we do not really understand - is that people with simple hypertension are also very vulnerable to developing this disease. So that's one of the unresolved questions.

And it will be interesting to see what the profile is of people who are infected but do not get ill. We will know in a few months - that question is already being addressed in China. Then you can go back and test for antibodies, because it looks as though everyone who has gone through the infection will develop antibodies - and that those will remain for a while.

There are people that have antibodies and have not presented to the medical services and claim that they have been healthy all the time. What's the genetic profile of those people as compared with the people who went to the medical wards? That is an interesting question.

One hint has already been discovered in China; your blood group could be important. It's very preliminary data, but in a year or so from now we will have a lot of data on that as well. (Courtesy: https://www.weforum.org/) For more information, go to the video: **The End of the Pandemic:** A Virologist's View: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsrA-dNjHLY

Related

The 1918 Pandemic Really Never Ended

An unthinkable 50 to 100 million people worldwide died from the 1918-1919 flu pandemic commonly known as the "Spanish Flu." It was the deadliest global pandemic since the Black Death, and rare among flu viruses for striking down the young and healthy, often within days of exhibiting the first symptoms. In the United States, the 1918 flu pandemic lowered the average life expectancy by 12 years.

What's even more remarkable about the 1918 flu, say infectious disease experts, is that it never really went away. After infecting an estimated 500 million people worldwide in 1918 and 1919 (a third of the global population), the H1N1 strain that caused the Spanish flu receded into the background and stuck around as the regular seasonal flu.

But every so often, direct descendants of the 1918 flu combined with bird flu or swine flu to create powerful new pandemic strains, which is exactly what happened in 1957, 1968 and 2009. Those later flu outbreaks, all created in part by the 1918 virus, claimed millions of additional lives, earning the 1918 flu the odious title of "the mother of all pandemics."

Jeffrey Taubenberger was part of the pioneering scientific team that first isolated and sequenced the genome of the 1918 flu virus in the late 1990s. The painstaking process involved extracting viral RNA from autopsied lung samples taken from American soldiers who died from the 1918 flu, plus one diseased lung preserved in the Alaskan permafrost for nearly 100 years.

Now chief of the Viral Pathogenesis and Evolution Section at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Taubenberger explains that genetic analyses of the 1918 flu indicate that it started as an avian flu and represented a completely new viral strain when it made the leap to humans shortly before 1918. Lab tests of the reconstructed 1918 virus show that in its original form, the virus's novel encoded proteins made it 100 times more lethal in mice than today's seasonal flu.

The 1918 pandemic struck in three distinct waves over a 12-month period. It first appeared in the spring of 1918 in North America and Europe largely in the trenches of World War I, then reemerged in its deadliest form in the fall of 1918, killing tens of millions of people worldwide from September through November. The final wave swept across Australia, the United States and Europe in the late winter and spring of 1919.

But did the 1918 flu simply "go away" after that third wave? Absolutely not, says Taubenberger. Since the whole world had been exposed to the virus, and had therefore developed natural immunity against it, the 1918 strain began to mutate and evolve in a process called "antigenic drift." Slightly altered versions of the 1918 flu reemerged in the winters of 1919-1920 and 1920-1921, but they were far less deadly and nearly indistinguishable from the seasonal flu.

"The 1918 flu definitely lost its real virulence by the early 1920s," says Taubenberger.

But what's truly incredible, according to genetic analyses, is that the same novel strain of flu first introduced in 1918 appears to be the direct ancestor of every seasonal and pandemic flu we've had over the past century.

"You can still find the genetic traces of the 1918 virus in the seasonal flus that circulate today," says Taubenberger. "Every single human infection with influenza A in the past 102 years is derived from that one introduction of the 1918 flu."

Welcome to the Pandemic Era

The 1918 flu pandemic was by far the deadliest flu outbreak of the 20th and 21st centuries to date, but it wasn't the only one to qualify as a pandemic. Even with the advent of the first seasonal flu vaccines after World War II, the flu virus has proven capable of some unexpected and deadly genetic tricks. In a normal flu season, vaccine scientists can track the most active viral strains and produce a vaccine that protects against changes in the human flu virus from year to year. But every so often, viral genes from the animal kingdom enter the mix.

(Article continues below)

COMMUNITY

(Article continues from above)
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Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

"If one animal is infected with two different influenza viruses at the same time," says Taubenberger, "maybe one virus from a bird and another from a human, those genes can mix and match to create a brand new virus that never existed before."

Young boys shown wearing pouches of garlic around their necks to ward off the Spanish Flu.

That's what happened in 1957 when the 1918 flu, which is an H1N1 virus, swapped genes with another bird flu giving us the H2N2 pandemic, which claimed a million lives worldwide. It happened again in 1968 with the creation of the so-called "Hong Kong Flu," an H3N2 virus that killed another million people. The so-called "Swine Flu" pandemic of 2009 has an even deeper backstory. When humans became infected with the 1918 pandemic flu, which was originally a bird flu, we also passed it on to pigs.

"One branch of the 1918 flu permanently adapted to pigs and became swine influenza that was seen in pigs in the US every year after 1918 and spread around the world," says Taubenberger.

In 2009, a strain of swine flu swapped genes with both human influenza and avian influenza to create a new variety of H1N1 flu that was "more like 1918 than had been seen in a long time," says Taubenberger. Around 300,000 people died from the 2009 flu pandemic.

All told, if 50 to 100 million people died in the 1918 and 1919 pandemic, and tens of millions more have died in the ensuing century of seasonal flus and pandemic outbreaks, then all of those deaths can be attributed to the single and accidental emergence in humans of the very successful and stubborn 1918 virus.

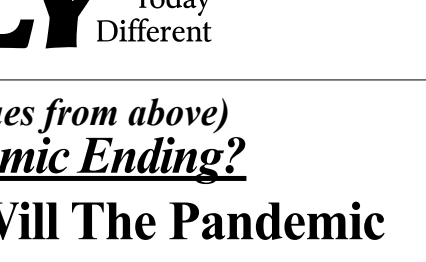
"We're still living in what I would call the '1918 pandemic era' 102 years later" says Taubenberger, "and I don't know how long it will last." (Courtesy history.com)

How 5 of History's Worst Pandemics Finally Ended

While some of the earliest pandemics faded by wiping out parts of the population, medical and public health initiatives were able to halt the spread of other diseases.

As human civilizations flourished, so did infectious disease. Large numbers of people living in close proximity to each other and to animals, often with poor sanitation and nutrition, provided fertile breeding grounds for disease. And new overseas trading routes spread the novel infections far and wide, creating the first global pandemics. Here's how five of the world's worst pandemics finally ended.

1. Plague of Justinian—No One Left to Die

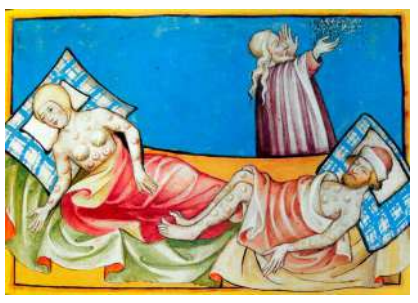


Yersinia pestis, formerly pasteurella pestis, was the bacteria responsible for the plague. Here it's seen under optical microscopy X 1000.
BSIP/Universal Images Group/Getty Images

Three of the deadliest pandemics in recorded history were caused by a single bacterium, Yersinia pestis, a fatal infection otherwise known as the plague. The Plague of Justinian arrived in Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, in 541 CE. It was carried over the Mediterranean Sea from Egypt, a recently conquered land paying tribute to Emperor Justinian in grain. Plague-ridden fleas hitched a ride on the black rats that snacked on the grain. The plague decimated Constantinople and spread like wildfire across Europe, Asia, North Africa and Arabia killing an estimated 30 to 50 million people, perhaps half of the world's population.

"People had no real understanding of how to fight it other than trying to avoid sick people," says Thomas Mockaitis, a history professor at DePaul University. "As to how the plague ended, the best guess is that the majority of people in a pandemic somehow survive, and those who survive have immunity."

2. Black Death—The Invention of Quarantine



A couple suffering from the blisters of the Black Death, the bubonic plague that swept through Europe in the Middle Ages. From the Swiss manuscript the Toggenburg Bible, 1411. (Photo/VCG Wilson/Corbis/Getty Images)

The plague never really went away, and when it returned 800 years later, it killed with reckless abandon. The Black Death, which hit Europe in 1347, claimed an astonishing 20 million lives in just four years. As for how to stop the disease, people still had no scientific understanding of contagion, says Mockaitis, but they knew that it had something to do with proximity. That's why forward-thinking officials in Venetian-controlled port city of Ragusa decided to keep newly arrived sailors in isolation until they could prove they weren't sick.

At first, sailors were held on their ships for 30 days, which became known in Venetian law as a trentino. As time went on, the Venetians increased the forced isolation to 40 days or a quarantino, the origin of the word quarantine and the start of its practice in the Western world.

"That definitely had an effect," says Mockaitis.

3. The Great Plague of London—Sealing Up the Sick

Scenes in the streets of London during the Great Plague of 1665.
(Photo/The Print Collector/Getty Images)

London never really caught a break after the Black Death. The plague resurfaced roughly every 10 years from 1348 to 1665—40 outbreaks in just over 300 years. And with each new plague epidemic, 20 percent of the men, women and children living in the British capital were killed. By the early 1500s, England imposed the first laws to separate and isolate the sick. Homes stricken by plague were marked with a bale of hay strung to a pole outside. If you had infected family members, you had to carry a white pole when you went out in public. Cats and dogs were believed to carry the disease, so there was a wholesale massacre of hundreds of thousands of animals.

The Great Plague of 1665 was the last and one of the worst of the centuries-long outbreaks, killing 100,000 Londoners in just seven months. All public entertainment was banned and victims were forcibly shut into their homes to prevent the spread of the disease. Red crosses were painted on their doors along with a plea for forgiveness: "Lord have mercy upon us."

As cruel as it was to shut up the sick in their homes and bury the dead in mass graves, it may have been the only way to bring the last great plague outbreak to an end.

4. Smallpox—A European Disease Ravages the New World

Dr. Edward Jenner performing his first vaccination against smallpox on James Phipps, circa 1796.
DEA Picture Library/Getty Images

Smallpox was endemic to Europe, Asia and Arabia for centuries, a persistent menace that killed three out of ten people it infected and left the rest with pockmarked scars. But the death rate in the Old World paled in comparison to the devastation wrought on native populations in the New World when the smallpox virus arrived in the 15th century with the first European explorers. The indigenous peoples of modern-day Mexico and the United States had zero natural immunity to smallpox and the virus cut them down by the tens of millions.

"There hasn't been a kill off in human history to match what happened in the Americas—90 to 95 percent of the indigenous population wiped out over a century," says Mockaitis. "Mexico goes from 11 million people pre-conquest to one million."

Centuries later, smallpox became the first virus epidemic to be ended by a vaccine. In the late 18th-century, a British doctor named Edward Jenner discovered that milkmaids infected with a milder virus called cowpox seemed immune to smallpox. Jenner famously inoculated his gardener's 8-year-old son with cowpox and then exposed him to the smallpox virus with no ill effect.

"[T]he annihilation of the smallpox, the most dreadful scourge of the human species, must be the final result of this practice," wrote Jenner in 1801.

And he was right. It took nearly two more centuries, but in 1980 the World Health Organization announced that smallpox had been completely eradicated from the face of the Earth.

5. Cholera—A Victory for Public Health Research

A satirical cartoon showing the River Thames and its offspring cholera, scrofula and diptheria, circa 1858.
Hulton Archive/Getty Images

In the early- to mid-19th century, cholera tore through England, killing tens of thousands. The prevailing scientific theory of the day said that the disease was spread by foul air known as a "miasma." But a British doctor named John Snow suspected that the mysterious disease, which killed its victims within days of the first symptoms, lurked in London's drinking water. Snow acted like a scientific Sherlock Holmes, investigating hospital records and morgue reports to track the precise locations of deadly outbreaks. He created a geographic chart of cholera deaths over a 10-day period and found a cluster of 500 fatal infections surrounding the Broad Street pump, a popular city well for drinking water.

"As soon as I became acquainted with the situation and extent of this irruption (sic) of cholera, I suspected some contamination of the water of the much-frequented street-pump in Broad Street," wrote Snow.

With dogged effort, Snow convinced local officials to remove the pump handle on the Broad Street drinking well, rendering it unusable, and like magic the infections dried up. Snow's work didn't cure cholera overnight, but it eventually led to a global effort to improve urban sanitation and protect drinking water from contamination. While cholera has largely been eradicated in developed countries, it's still a persistent killer in third-world countries lacking adequate sewage treatment and access to clean drinking water. (Courtesy history.com)