

## Medical Monitoring and Border Closing

### China pulls ahead with strong measures – Special Snap-Shot

March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020



**To enter an apartment complex or office space, people must first have their health code scanned. Photo: Alipay**

“[In view of the rapid spread of COVID-19 across the world](#), China has decided to temporarily suspend the entry into China by foreign nationals holding visas or residence permits still valid to the time of this announcement, effective from 0 a.m., 28 March 2020.”

This is the beginning of the announcement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, National Immigration Administration, issued on March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020. China has been taking strong measures within the county and now also at its borders. Families were separated within China, supply chains were disrupted and this latest initiative is now targeting the re-import of the virus from abroad. Whether this is related to foreigners or possibly Chinese passport holders, nobody can tell.

[After detecting a total of 595 confirmed COVID-19 cases](#) (168 within the last 3 days) among travelers arriving from other countries, China has decided to temporarily suspend the entry of most foreigners into China, even those with an existing visa. Before this decision, all foreigners arriving in China were asked to first provide health

information and accept body temperature checks at the airport, then to stay in a 14 days quarantine at home or an assigned location at one's own expense. During the quarantine, they are requested to report body temperature daily.

[In some cities, such as Shanghai](#) and Tianjin, foreigners are also able to apply for the new Health Code, which is widely used health monitoring system that was created and programmed after the outbreak of Covid-19 in China. This service is also available in English. Information on how to do this can be accessed [here](#).

### **What is this Health Code?**

[The so called “Health Code” system started in Yuhang District](#), Hangzhou (the city where its developer, Alibaba, is based in), in order to better manage people’s health situations during the current epidemic, and, at the same time, to reduce contact, eliminate document inspections and paper registrations. Especially now that more and more Chinese are returning to work since [the strict quarantine measures are being lifted](#).

While the Yuhang system first launched on Alipay on February 7<sup>th</sup>, another leading IT player, Tencent, launched its version of a Health Code system for citizens in its hometown – Shenzhen. On February 15<sup>th</sup>, [Shenzhen became the first city](#) where people could use the code as proof of their health situation when entering any residential compound in town.

Since, the “Health Code” system started spreading throughout the country, by February 24<sup>th</sup>, [it had already covered more than 200 cities across China](#). As it is no longer just a tool for monitoring an individual’s health situation, starting from February 21<sup>st</sup>, the “Health Code” in Hangzhou for example is also connected to citizens’ electronic health cards and social security cards. Therefore, it can be used for service registrations at hospitals, such as medical inspections, medicine pick-ups, etc. Other cities and the nationwide version followed this lead soon afterwards.



**Example of successful nationwide Health Code registration and QR Code without color code for an individual based in Beijing. Photo: MFC**

### How does it work?

Though many cities choose to use Alipay (Alibaba) or WeChat (Tencent) as the platform of their Health Code system, the application process is different from city to city.

[In most cases](#), to register to this new program, people need to put in their name, national identification (ID) number, phone number and answer detailed questions about recent travel activities and their health status. Then after some calculation a (usually) colored QR Code is issued. Green means free entrance, yellow means quarantine in the following 7 days with daily online health checks, while red equals quarantine for 14 days with daily online checks. [These codes can't be screenshots](#) or otherwise copied because they possess a time stamp, which allows to prevent any attempt to use an old code.

[In some cities like Shanghai](#), Expats are also able to register for a health code after registering with their real names on Alipay. This will then also replace any paperwork necessary to enter and leave residential areas or office buildings.

## 杭州健康码



【绿码】

凭码通行



【黄码】

实施7天内隔离，连续  
(不超过)7天健康打卡正常  
转为绿码



【红码】

实施14天隔离，连续14天  
健康打卡正常转为绿码

防控疫情 人人有责

**Color codes issued in Hangzhou. Source: Alipay**

At first, Health Codes were only recognized in the issuing cities. If you travelled inside China, you had to use the respective city's or region's own Health Code APP. As of February 29<sup>th</sup>, there is a nationwide service available which, unlike many regional counterparts, doesn't use the 3-color system. However, the regional versions can still be used.

[In a press conference on March 20<sup>th</sup>, Mao Qunan](#), director of the planning Department of the National Health Commission (Chinese National Health Ministry) stated that it used to be difficult to use a QR code from a certain city in another city as there are differences in policies in different provinces. However, presently, most areas now accept QR-Codes from other cities. Hence, the Health Code system is developing rapidly and can already be used nationwide.



**Nationwide Health Code. Without color code. Photo: MFC**

## **Issues embedded in this system**

[According to the New York Times](#), March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, the code does more than just gather the information users put in voluntarily. Their research team found out that information is also passed on to the police without notifying the users. Hence, it could be used for further surveillance of Chinese citizens, even after the epidemic. especially [since it has already been announced that the service will continue](#) after the epidemic. Another issue the APP faces right now is that neither the developers nor the government have disclosed how the system rates people. Many people don't know why they are being put under quarantine, as there is no explanation. If someone puts in false / incorrect information, they could easily get a green code while others from safe areas who might just have had a cold will get a red code, revealing a large challenge of the system as whole.