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WKU students from China raise awareness about coronavirus

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Western Kentucky University Chinese national students Zishuo Li (left) and Lu Dai (right) have been raising awareness about the impact of coronavirus in China. They're asking the public to make donations to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Photo courtesy of WKU

As the novel coronavirus has swept around the world from China in recent weeks, Western Kentucky University student Lu Dai has closely monitored updates on social media and checked in with family members whenever she can.

Lu is a senior from Henan province in mainland China, not far from the epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak in Hubei province.

While her family members contend with lives disrupted by the outbreak, she watches from halfway around the world. Some in her family are government employees who must check up on others, she said.

“I told them ‘Please protect yourself well,’ ” Lu said, adding that her family’s holding up OK.

Lu and Zishuo Li, another student from China, have worked in recent weeks to raise awareness and support for people back home, according to a university news release. Both are members of the campus Chinese Students and Scholars Association.

Although his own family lives in northern China, far from Hubei, Zishuo’s father is also a government employee and has to travel for work, the news release said. Speaking to the Daily News on Wednesday, he likened people like his father to soldiers fighting in a war.

“They are the people who fight on the front lines,” trying to protect others, he said.

China makes up the vast majority of the world’s 94,000 coronavirus infections and 3,200 deaths since it first surfaced there in late December, but there has been a drop in cases in the country since the end of January, The Associated Press reported.

According to the AP, some experts believe the easing crisis there – with more new cases being reported outside China than inside it – suggests containment is possible.

Still, even with the easing of COVID-19 cases in China, the virus is taking hold elsewhere around the globe. There are clusters in Italy, Iran, South Korea and Japan, and the U.S. has more than 120 cases in at least 15 states, according to the AP. On Wednesday, the number of coronavirus deaths rose to 11, with Washington state reporting its 10th death and California reporting its first.

Initially, the students planned to donate supplies, such as face masks and goggles, but they ran into challenges finding enough supplies and getting them where they're most needed.

Instead, the students are encouraging donations to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Donations to the worldwide humanitarian aid group may be made online at wku.edu/cssa.

By supporting people in China affected by the outbreak, Zishuo said supporters are serving the world as a whole.

"It's not about individual countries now. It's global," he said.

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