

S. Korea reports no new MERS cases for first time in 16 days

June 20 2015

South Korea on Saturday said that there had been no new cases of MERS reported for the first time in 16 days, raising hopes the country is winning the battle to contain the deadly virus.

But a 63-year-old man died in the southern city of Jeonju late Saturday, raising the number of fatalities to 25, a health ministry official told AFP.

He apparently contracted the virus on May 27 in the emergency room of Samsung Medical Centre in southern Seoul where he visited with his wife, who suffers from cancer, Yonhap news agency said.

Confirmed cases were stable at 166 over the past 24 hours, the health ministry said.

Six more patients had recovered and were released from hospital, cutting to 106 the number now undergoing treatment, while restrictions on more than 700 people were lifted Saturday, leaving some 5,200 people in quarantine.

The ministry on Friday reported one new case, the lowest rate of new infections in two weeks, saying the outbreak appeared to have started subsiding since the first case was diagnosed on May 20.

One of those who had recovered was 37-year-old doctor Park Kyu-Tae, who also contracted the virus at Samsung Medical Centre—one of the epicentres of the outbreak—on May 27.

He fully recovered from the disease and returned home on Thursday, only a week after he was diagnosed.

Park caught the virus while working in the hospital's emergency room, which had been contaminated by a "super spreader" of the virus, the JoongAng Ilbo daily reported.

In Thailand, which Thursday reported Southeast Asia's first case of MERS since the deadly virus was confirmed in South Korea, authorities stepped up measures to contain the outbreak.

Bangkok's main airport has installed additional thermoscan machines to detect and isolate passengers arriving with a fever, one of the symptoms of MERS, said a health ministry statement on Saturday.

It has also set up counters offering passengers alcoholic gel disinfectant and free surgical masks.

The 75-year-old Omani man found to have MERS in Thailand was "slightly better", a health ministry spokesman told AFP, while no new cases have been confirmed.

He is in a hospital on the outskirts of Bangkok where he was transferred after arriving earlier in the week for treatment for a heart condition.

Test results Friday for his three accompanying relatives, quarantined at the same hospital, were negative for two and "inconclusive" for the third.

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