

## **S. Korea vows 'all-out' effort to curb growing MERS outbreak**

June 7 2015

---

South Korea reported its fifth death from MERS as the government on Sunday vowed "all-out" measures to curb the outbreak that was threatening to spread nationwide, including tracking mobile phones of those in quarantine.

The number of infections rose to 64 after 14 new cases, including one death, of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) were confirmed late Saturday night, the health ministry said.

It is the largest outbreak outside Saudi Arabia where it has infected more than 950 since 2012.

As of Sunday, more than 2,300 people had been placed under quarantine of varying degrees. About 2,100 were told to stay home and strictly limit their interactions with others, while about 200 were isolated in state hospitals.

All the 14 new infections were among people already in quarantine after being exposed to those diagnosed earlier, the ministry said.

However, Busan city authorities reported an additional case in the country's southern port and second-largest city, sparking alarm that the outbreak may spread nationwide.

The case was not included among the 14 new infections confirmed by the health ministry.

Acting Prime Minister Choi Kyung-Hwan vowed Sunday that "all-out efforts" would be made to curb the spread of the disease in Asia's fourth-largest economy.

He urged the public not to panic, saying all 64 patients had already been in hospital quarantine.

"We can put the situation under control because... the outbreak is not spreading to the outside community," Choi said in a press conference.

"People should not overreact and should cooperate closely (with the government) to minimise negative impact on the economy," he said.

The government will step up monitoring on those placed under observation, including tracking the locations of those in quarantine at home via their mobile phones, Choi said.

"Please understand that it is an inevitable measure to ensure the safety of your neighbours and families," Choi said.

The first case—reported on May 20—was of a 68-year-old man diagnosed in the city of Pyeongtaek, about 65 kilometers (40 miles) south of Seoul, after a trip to Saudi Arabia.

The administration of President Park Geun-Hye and health officials have come under a storm of criticism over a perceived slow and insufficient response to the outbreak.

## **Public anxiety**

A policy not to name the hospitals where patients were diagnosed or treated was a major focus of public criticism.

Choi on Sunday disclosed the list of 24 such hospitals—mostly in Seoul or Gyeonggi province surrounding the capital—saying it was aimed at "easing public anxiety."

Authorities had earlier confirmed one case in Sunchang, about 240 kilometres south of Seoul, with the entire village of about 100 people having been sealed since Saturday.

Bigger budget support was also promised for those placed under quarantine and for local governments and school authorities struggling to contain the outbreak.

Samsung Medical Centre in Seoul—where 17 cases were confirmed—said Sunday over 890 patients and medical staff had been exposed to those infected.

"We notified the 893 people immediately and carried out necessary quarantine measures," the hospital president Song Jae-Hoon told reporters.

Seoul city mayor Park Won-Soon however warned of potential danger of the outbreak at the hospital—one of the country's largest, visited by more than 8,000 patients a day.

"We are afraid that there is a significant possibility that the outbreak at the Samsung hospital could spread to the local community," Park said Sunday.

Park last week declared "war" on the outbreak and called for more transparency from the central government to curb the spread of the disease in the capital—home to 10 million people.

The Seoul education council also ordered Sunday the closure on all 126

kindergartens and primary schools in Gangnam and Seocho districts in southern Seoul, where the Samsung hospital is located.

Health authorities warned that they were expecting more new cases of those who had been infected from the hospital in recent weeks.

"Considering the incubation period, we believe that more new patients will be confirmed...later today and tomorrow," Kwon Jun-Wook, a senior [health ministry](#) official told reporters Sunday.

With the number of new cases growing on a daily basis and public fear rising, more than 1,300 schools have been closed temporarily. Public events and sports games were cancelled across the country.

More than 20,000 foreign travellers have cancelled planned tours to the South from Monday to Thursday, Seoul's tourism board said.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) said on Friday it would send a team of experts to South Korea for a joint mission with Seoul in collecting information on the [outbreak](#).

More than 20 countries have been affected by MERS, with most cases in Saudi Arabia.

The virus is considered a deadlier but less infectious cousin of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) which killed hundreds of people when it appeared in Asia in 2003.

© 2015 AFP

Citation: S. Korea vows 'all-out' effort to curb growing MERS outbreak (2015, June 7) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-06-korea-vows-all-out-effort-curb.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.