

Fifth person dies of MERS virus in South Korea

June 7 2015, byTong-Hyung Kim



A tourist wears mask as a precaution against MERS, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, virus at the Gyeongbok Palace, one of South Korea's well-known landmarks, in Seoul, South Korea, Sunday, June 7, 2015. A fifth person in the country has died of the MERS virus, as the government announced Sunday it was strengthening measures to stem the spread of the disease and public fear. (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man)

A fifth person in South Korea has died of the MERS virus, as the government announced Sunday that it was strengthening measures to

stem the spread of the disease and public fear.

Sixty-four people in South Korea have been infected by Middle East Respiratory Syndrome since last month in the largest outbreak outside the Middle East. Hundreds of schools have closed and more than 2,000 people are isolated at their homes or in facilities after having contact with patients infected with the [virus](#), health officials said.

Acting Prime Minister Choi Kyung-hwan said Sunday that there was no reason to believe that the virus would significantly spread further in the country.

"So far, all the MERS cases have been hospital-associated, and there has been no case of an infection in other social settings. We think we have a chance at putting the outbreak under total control," Choi told a news conference.

While the virus has no vaccine, health experts say it spreads through close contact with infected people and not through the air.

The U.N. health agency has reported that there's no evidence yet in South Korea of "sustained transmission in the community."

Departing from its earlier policy, the government announced the names of the 24 hospitals where the MERS patients have been diagnosed or had been treated before their condition was confirmed. This will allow people who have visited those facilities in recent weeks to report themselves if they are showing symptoms similar to MERS-related illnesses, Choi said.

While the government had earlier identified one hospital in a city south of Seoul where the first MERS case was confirmed, and another in southern Seoul that has been a significant source of infections, it had

been reluctant to release the full list of hospitals over concerns that it would cause a disruption in services if people started avoiding them.

Choi said the [government](#) will also strengthen its monitoring of the hundreds of undiagnosed patients who are quarantined at their homes because officials believe they might have contracted the virus. It includes tracking their whereabouts through cellphone signals.

More than 1,200 schools were closed at the end of last week in reaction to fears about the spreading virus, according to the Ministry of Education. The number will surely rise on Monday after education authorities in Seoul and the neighboring Gyeonggi Province on Sunday ordered more schools in their regions to participate in the temporary closures.

MERS was discovered in 2012 and has mostly been centered in Saudi Arabia. It belongs to the family of coronaviruses that includes the common cold and SARS, and can cause fever, breathing problems, pneumonia and kidney failure. The virus has spread primarily through contact with camels, but it can also spread from human fluids and droplets.

© 2015 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Fifth person dies of MERS virus in South Korea (2015, June 7) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-06-person-dies-mers-virus-south.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.