

S. Korea reports 11th death from MERS outbreak (Update)

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Workers wearing protective gears fumigate and spray antiseptic solution as a precaution against the spread of MERS, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, virus outside Wangsimni Subway Station in Seoul, South Korea, Thursday, June 11, 2015. Experts from the World Health Organization and South Korea on Wednesday urged the reopening of more than 2,700 schools closed over fears of the deadly MERS virus.(AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)

South Korea on Friday reported an 11th death from the MERS virus

outbreak, but officials said they are seeing a fewer number of new infections and that it was unlikely there would be another large outbreak.

More than 120 people in South Korea have contracted Middle East respiratory syndrome since the country reported its first case last month. The outbreak has been contained only in hospitals but it has caused widespread fears and rumors, and about 2,790 schools and kindergartens remained closed Friday.

South Korean officials believe the disease has peaked and it would begin easing in coming days. Their belief is based on a view that the virus' maximum two-week incubation period for those infected at a Seoul hospital considered as the main source of the outbreak ended Friday.

There are a few other hospitals where additional cases were later reported. Their patients' incubation periods have not ended, but officials said they are quarantining people who had contacts with infected people and monitoring them so there is little chance of the virus spreading from those hospitals.

"We see no danger of an additional spread," Jeong Eun-kyeong, a senior official from the Korea Center for Disease Control and Prevention, told a televised news conference. She said only a small number of new infections could still be reported from those hospitals.

Some experts have said the outbreak could continue if there are a large number of infected people who evaded government quarantine measures and spread the virus.



Workers wearing protective gears spray antiseptic solution as a precaution against the spread of MERS, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, virus outside Wangsimni Subway Station in Seoul, South Korea, Thursday, June 11, 2015. Experts from the World Health Organization and South Korea on Wednesday urged the reopening of more than 2,700 schools closed over fears of the deadly MERS virus.(AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)

The Health Ministry on Friday reported just four new MERS cases, after registering 14 cases Thursday and 13 cases Wednesday. About 3,680 people were still isolated on Friday after possible contacts with infected people, a decline from more than 3,800 on Thursday, according to the ministry.

Senior ministry official Kwon Deok-cheol told the news conference that the public should stop worrying too much about the outbreak as the number of new cases has been falling.

Most of the deaths so far have been of people suffering from pre-existing medical conditions, such as respiratory problems or cancer.



South Korean police officers wearing masks as a precaution against Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) stand guard during a rally in Seoul, South Korea, Thursday, June 11, 2015. Experts from the World Health Organization and South Korea on Wednesday urged the reopening of more than 2,700 schools closed over fears of the deadly MERS virus. (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man)

A 72-year-old MERS patient, who had pneumonia, died Friday and became the country's 11th death linked to the MERS outbreak, the Health Ministry said in a statement.

Experts think MERS can spread in respiratory droplets, such as by coughing. But transmissions have mainly occurred through close contact, such as living with or caring for an infected person.

MERS has mostly been centered in Saudi Arabia and has a death rate of about 40 percent among reported cases. It belongs to the family of coronaviruses that includes the common cold and SARS, and can cause fever, breathing problems, pneumonia and kidney failure.

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