

Foreigner with MERS in Philippines now free of the virus

July 10 2015

A 36-year-old foreigner who tested positive for MERS after arriving in the Philippines from the Middle East is now free of the virus and will leave the hospital this weekend, officials said Friday.

Department of Health spokesman Lyndon Lee Suy said the foreigner's close contact, a Filipino woman, is also well but will remain hospitalized until she completes a 14-day quarantine period on July 18.

Passengers seated near the foreigner on his flight were traced and none manifested any symptoms, Lee Suy added. They are among 112 contacts of the foreigner who have been traced and are being monitored daily by health authorities until they complete the 14-day period.

Lee Suy said two laboratory tests conducted on the foreigner within 48 hours were negative for the virus, leading authorities to conclude that he "is free of the virus and would not be able to infect others as well."

Officials have not disclosed the nationality of the patient, who arrived in the Philippines on June 19 from Saudi Arabia but also stayed in Dubai. He left on a second trip before exhibiting any symptoms and returned to the Philippines, said the officials, who did not disclose where he went.

The patient developed a fever and cough on June 30, sought medical care on July 2, tested positive for the MERS virus on July 4 and was transferred to the government's Research Institute for Tropical Medicine, officials said.

Julie Hall, country representative for the World Health Organization, praised the government's "rapid, strong response" to the case.

In February, a Filipino nurse tested positive for MERS after arriving home from Saudi Arabia. She was cleared of the virus the same month.

MERS has killed 36 people in South Korea, where 186 cases have been confirmed, according to the Health Ministry. It is the biggest outbreak outside the Middle East region, where the virus was first seen in 2012 in Saudi Arabia.

Typical symptoms include fever, cough and shortness of breath, and sometimes pneumonia and diarrhea. About 36 percent of reported patients have died, according to WHO.

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