

Normality returns to hospital at centre of Korea MERS crisis

July 20 2015

The hospital at the epicentre of South Korea's deadly MERS outbreak started to resume normal operations Monday, as officials moved closer to declaring a formal end to a crisis that triggered widespread panic and choked the local economy.

The past two weeks have seen no new reported cases of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), which killed 36 people since the first case—diagnosed May 20—developed into the largest outbreak of the virus outside Saudi Arabia.

Of the total 186 reported cases, nearly half were diagnosed at the Samsung Medical Center in southern Seoul—one of the top hospitals in the country.

The outbreak at the facility, which belongs to South Korea's giant, family-run Samsung conglomerate, prompted the company's heir apparent Jay. Y. Lee to publicly apologise last month for "causing great pain and concern."

Among those infected were 13 medical staff. Administrators partially shut down the centre on June 14, to focus exclusively on dealing with MERS patients.

But with the outbreak effectively over, the hospital announced Monday that it had begun a "step-by-step resumption of services" for existing patients.

Treatment for new patients and emergency room services will be normalised early next month, it said on its website.

Health authorities initially withheld the names of facilities where the virus had been detected—partly in an effort to prevent business losses.

The secrecy was heavily criticised for prompting infected people to go "doctor shopping"—visiting different hospitals to obtain second or third opinions, furthering the spread of the virus.

The [outbreak](#) dealt a severe blow to businesses from tourism to retail as people have shunned crowded venues and more than 120,000 foreigners cancelled planned trips to Seoul.

Earlier this month, the government announced a 22 trillion won (\$19.8 billion) stimulus package, much of which was aimed at supporting businesses hurt by the MERS crisis.

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