

South Korea announces official end to MERS outbreak

December 23 2015

South Korea announced Wednesday the official end to a deadly outbreak of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) that killed 36 people and sparked widespread panic in Asia's fourth-largest economy.

Seoul's health ministry cited "no further risk" of infection, about seven months after the first case was diagnosed in May.

World Health Organization standards call for a four-week waiting period after the last MERS patient fully recovers before an outbreak can definitively be said to be over.

The virus infected 186 people, with nearly 17,000 people confined to their homes and thousands of schools temporarily closing at the peak of the largest MERS outbreak outside Saudi Arabia, where it first appeared in 2012.

Seoul said a 35-year-old man, who had been fighting cancer before his MERS diagnosis, died on November 25 due to the "rapid worsening of his underlying condition".

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.

The MERS outbreak took a heavy toll on the South Korean economy, stifling consumer spending and devastating the tourist sector for months.

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