

At least five infected with HIV at Chinese traditional medicine hospital

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At least five patients at a traditional Chinese medicine hospital in China were accidentally infected with HIV, officials said Thursday, as authorities moved to censor online discussion over the incident.

A technician at the Zhejiang Provincial Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine re-used a tube employed in an earlier medical exam for an HIV-positive patient, the province's health and family planning commission said in a statement on its official website, calling it a "severe violation of procedure".

The local centre for disease control confirmed that five patients were infected, it added, without offering further information about the total number of patients the technician may have exposed to the virus.

The government body had been notified of the situation by the hospital on January 26. It did not explain why no statement was issued in the interim period, nor did it specify when the infections occurred.

It was not clear what those who were accidentally infected were originally being treated for.

As of Thursday afternoon, the hospital's website had been taken offline. No hospital representatives could be reached for comment.

Most Chinese-language media reports about the accidental HIV infections had been deleted by Thursday afternoon, leaving only the

short government statement in online circulation.

Many critical comments on social media had been removed.

"It's really a disaster. I can't imagine the accident happened in one of the best hospitals in Hangzhou," said one of the few posts still remaining on the Twitter-like Weibo platform.

One user "shocked" by the incident noted that posts about it were rapidly being deleted and that major Chinese news outlets had disabled comment and forwarding functions on their online reports.

Calling the censorship disgusting, the user added: "I think people have the right to know the truth."

In a 2015 report China told the UN that it had 501,000 cases of HIV/AIDS as of the end of 2014.

News of the accidental infections comes days after China announced plans to double the number of AIDS patients it treats with TCM as part of a broader push to increase the use of the ancient practice in the country's medical system.

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