

Australia confirms first coronavirus cases

January 25 2020

Australia confirmed on Saturday its first four cases of the new coronavirus that has claimed 41 lives in China, becoming the latest country in a growing list to be affected by the illness.

One man was being treated in isolation after arriving in Melbourne a week ago from the Chinese city of Wuhan, the epicentre of the outbreak.

He has pneumonia but is in a stable condition, health officials said.

Three other men in Sydney who also arrived recently from China had tested positive for the disease and were in isolation in local hospitals.

"They are not particularly unwell," New South Wales state chief health officer Kerry Chant told a press conference.

She said public health officials had managed to track most of the people who had been with two of the men on their flights from China and none were showing symptoms of the illness.

Officials were still trying to trace the travel of the other man and are waiting on test results from several other people suspected of contracting the disease.

NSW Health Minister Brad Hazzard praised the three men in Sydney for approaching doctors once their symptoms arose.

Authorities in Queensland state said five other people had been cleared after they were suspected of infection.

The previously unknown 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) is thought to have originated in a market in Wuhan where exotic animals and bushmeat were sold.

It has infected around 1,300 people in China and spread to almost a dozen other countries, including France and the United States.

The virus has caused global concern because of its similarity to SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), which killed hundreds across mainland China and Hong Kong in 2002-2003.

Health experts say some human-to-human transmission has been recorded, particularly in Wuhan, a city of 11 million now under lockdown in a bid to limit the spread of the disease.

Australian health minister Greg Hunt said passengers who travelled on the same Melbourne-bound plane as the infected man were being contacted "to provide them with information and advice".

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