China reports 2nd death from virus behind pneumonia outbreak

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A traveler wears a facemask as she stands near the Beijing Railway Station in Beijing, Friday, Jan. 17, 2020. A second person has died from a new form of coronavirus in central China, health authorities said late Thursday. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)

A second person has died from a new coronavirus that has caused an

outbreak of pneumonia in central China, health authorities said.

A 69-year-old man surnamed Xiong fell ill with the respiratory condition on Dec. 31, according to a statement late Thursday from the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission. He died Wednesday.

Xiong exhibited abnormal renal function, severe impairment in multiple organs, inflammation of the heart muscle and other pressing conditions when he was admitted to the hospital. It was not clear from the commission's statement whether these were preexisting issues or consequences of the viral pneumonia.

In total, 41 people in Wuhan have been diagnosed with a novel coronavirus, a family of viruses that can cause both the common cold and more severe diseases like SARS and MERS. As of late Thursday, 12 patients have been cured and discharged and five were being treated for acute conditions.

Xiong's is the second death associated with the outbreak. Last Saturday, a 61-year-old man who had abdominal tumors and chronic liver disease died.

Authorities have tracked more than 700 people who were in close contact with infected patients. Among them, no related cases have been found. However, the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission has not ruled out limited human-to-human transmission, revealing a woman may have contracted the virus from her husband.

The Chinese government is keen to avoid a repeat of SARS, or severe acute respiratory syndrome. The SARS epidemic began in southern China in late 2002, then spread to more than two dozen countries, killing nearly 800 people.

A traveler wears a facemask as he walks in front of the Beijing Railway Station in Beijing, Friday, Jan. 17, 2020. A second person has died from a new form of coronavirus in central China, health authorities said late Thursday. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)

Most of the coronavirus patients this time either worked at or visited a particular seafood market in Wuhan. The market has since been shut down for investigation and disinfection.

Two patients in Thailand and another in Japan have been diagnosed with the virus.

A 74-year-old tourist was intercepted at a Thai airport on Jan. 13 with

symptoms of lung infection, the country's public health ministry said Friday. She is being treated in the same hospital, east of Bangkok, as a Chinese woman who was diagnosed with the virus after entering the country last week.

The Chinese woman is getting better and will soon be released, said Sukhum Kanchanapimai, Thailand's permanent secretary for public health.

Japan's [health] ministry said Thursday the virus had been confirmed in a man who had been hospitalized in Japan with pneumonia symptoms after traveling to Wuhan earlier this month. His condition has improved. Kyodo News agency reported the man is Chinese.