

N. Korea reports another disease outbreak amid COVID-19 wave

June 16 2022, by Hyung-Jin Kim



In this photo provided by the North Korean government, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and his wife Ri Sol Ju prepare medicines at an unannounced place in North Korea Wednesday, June 15, 2022 to send them to Haeju City where an infectious disease occurred. Independent journalists were not given access to cover the event depicted in this image distributed by the North Korean government. The content of this image is as provided and cannot be independently verified. Korean language watermark on image as provided by source reads: "KCNA" which is the abbreviation for Korean Central News

Agency. Credit: Korean Central News Agency/Korea News Service via AP

North Korea on Thursday reported the eruption of another infectious disease in addition to its [ongoing COVID-19 outbreak](#), saying leader Kim Jong Un has donated his private medicines to those stricken with the new disease.

It's unclear how serious the new epidemic is, but some outside observers say North Korea likely aims to burnish Kim's image as a leader caring about public livelihoods as he needs greater public support to overcome pandemic-related hardships.

Kim on Wednesday offered his family's reserve medicines for those diagnosed with "an acute enteric epidemic" in the southwestern Haeju city, the official Korean Central News Agency reported. The North's main Rodong Sinmun newspaper separately carried a front-page photo showing Kim and his wife Ri Sol Ju reviewing saline solutions and other medicines that they were donating.

KCNA didn't elaborate on exactly what the epidemic is and how many people have been infected.

Some observers say the "an enteric epidemic" in North Korea refers to an infectious disease like typhoid, dysentery or cholera, which are intestinal illnesses caused by germs via contaminated food and water or contact with feces of infected people.

Such diseases routinely occur in North Korea, which lacks good water treatment facilities and whose public healthcare infrastructure largely remains broken since the mid-1990s.

After North Korea last month reported a rising number of patients with feverish symptoms following its admission of the coronavirus outbreak, South Korea's spy agency said that "a considerable number" of those fever cases included those sick with diseases like measles, typhoid and pertussis.

"The outbreak of measles or typhoid isn't uncommon in North Korea. I think it's true there is an outbreak of an infectious [disease](#) there but North Korea is using it as an opportunity to emphasize that Kim is caring for his people," said Ahn Kyung-su, head of [DPRKHEALTH.ORG](#), a website focusing on [health issues](#) in North Korea. "So it's more like a [political message](#) than medical one."

Last month, Kim already sent his family's medicines to COVID-19 patients, according to state media reports.

KCNA said more than 4.5 million out of the country's 26 million people have fallen ill due to an unidentified fever but only 73 died. The country has identified only a fraction of those as confirmed coronavirus cases due to an apparent lack of test kits in the country. Many foreign experts [question the North's death toll](#), saying that's likely underreported to protect Kim from any political damage.

During a ruling party conference last week, Kim claimed the pandemic situation has passed the stage of "serious crisis." But the country still maintains elevated restrictions that some outside experts say will further strain the country's already troubled economy hit by long-running pandemic-related border shutdowns and U.N. sanctions.

Later Thursday, South Korea's Unification Ministry renewed its offer of inter-Korean cooperation on health and medical issues. After the North's admission of the COVID-19 outbreak, South Korea and the United States offered the humanitarian shipments of vaccines, [medical supplies](#)

and other assistance, but the North hasn't responded.

© 2022 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: N. Korea reports another disease outbreak amid COVID-19 wave (2022, June 16)
retrieved 27 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-06-korea-disease-outbreak-covid-.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.