



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Media Statement

To: Editors & Health Journalists
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Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV), No cause for panic

South Africans are assured that measures are in place to detect, manage and contain any cases of Novel Coronavirus should it come to our shores. So far, there are not suspected cases reported. Port health professionals routinely conducts temperature screening for all international travelers. However, due to the current risk of importation of inadvertent cases of 2019-nCoV from Wuhan City – China, Port Health authorities have enhanced surveillance of all travelers from Asia, especially China. Fortunately, **OR Tambo and Cape Town International Airports are the only Ports of entry with direct flights from Asia.**

South Africa has developed and distributed clinical guidelines and case definitions to doctors and nurses in both the public and the private sectors. These include information on how to diagnosis and respond to a possible 2019-nCoV case.

Provinces have activated outbreak response teams and are on high alert to detect and manage inadvertent cases that may arrive in the country.

No restrictions on travel to China

Based on currently available information, the World Health Organization (WHO) does not recommend any restriction of travel or trade. However, the department advise travelers to Wuhan (China) should avoid contact with animals and are encouraged to practice good hand hygiene and cough etiquette in order to reduce the risk of infection with respiratory viruses. The following are emphasised:

- Avoiding close contact with people suffering from acute respiratory infections.
- Practice frequent hand-washing, especially after direct contact with ill people or their environment.
- Avoid visiting markets where live animals are sold.
- Travelers with symptoms of acute respiratory infection should practice cough etiquette (maintain distance, cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or clothing and wash hands).
- Health practitioners should provide to travellers information to reduce the general risk of acute respiratory infections, via travel health clinics, travel agencies, conveyance operators and at points of entry. Travelers should also be encouraged to self-report if they feel ill.

In case of symptoms suggestive of respiratory illness before, during or after travel, the traveler must seek medical attention and share travel history with their healthcare provider.

Background

On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) China Country Office was informed of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China. On 7 January 2020; the causative pathogen was identified as a novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV). The majority of the cases were linked to a seafood, poultry and live wildlife market in Wuhan City, suggesting that the novel coronavirus has a possible animal origin. According to WHO, as of 20 January 2020, 282 confirmed cases of 2019-nCoV have been reported from four countries i.e. China (278 cases), Thailand (2 cases), Japan (1 case) and the Republic of Korea (1 case); most of the cases are currently experiencing mild to moderate symptoms. The cases in Thailand, Japan and Republic of Korea were exported from Wuhan City, China.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. Some cause illness in people; numerous other coronaviruses circulate among animals, including camels, cats, and bats. Rarely, animal coronaviruses can evolve to be able to infect and cause illness in people. Sometimes these viruses can also develop the ability to spread between people. Examples of other coronaviruses where this has happened are the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV), first reported from Saudi Arabia in 2012, and the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (SARS-CoV), first recognised in China in 2002.

Situation update

Among the 278 cases confirmed in China, 258 cases were reported from Hubei Province, 14 from Guangdong Province, five from Beijing Municipality and one from Shanghai Municipality. Of the 278 confirmed cases, 51 are severely ill and 12 are in critical condition; six deaths have been reported from Wuhan City. Two cases were reported in Guangdong Province where the cases did not travel to Wuhan City, but had contact with other cases.

Since this novel coronavirus has only been recently identified, there is limited information regarding the mode/s of transmission, clinical features, and severity of disease at this stage. The main clinical signs and symptoms are fever and cough with a few patients presenting with difficulty in breathing and bilateral infiltrates on chest X-rays. Treatment is supportive as no specific therapy has been shown to be effective. At present, no vaccine is available for 2019-nCoV.

WHO has been in regular and direct contact with Chinese as well as Japanese, Korean and Thai authorities since the reporting of these cases. These countries have shared information with WHO under the International Health Regulations. WHO is also informing other countries about the situation and providing support as requested. WHO has developed and shared interim guidance for laboratory diagnosis, clinical management, infection prevention and control, home care for mild patients, risk communication and community engagement. Countries, including South Africa are using these guidance documents to revise national preparedness plans.

WHO is also working with networks of researchers and other experts to coordinate global work on surveillance, epidemiology, modelling, diagnostics, clinical care and treatment, and other ways to identify, manage the disease and limit onward transmission.

Response in affected countries

National authorities in China are conducting active case finding within and outside of Wuhan City as well in all provinces. Infrared thermometers have been installed in airports, railway stations, long-distance bus stations, and ferry terminals. The implicated market in Wuhan city was closed on 1 January 2020 for environmental sanitation and disinfection. Health inspection have been expanded to other markets as well. Public education on disease prevention and environmental hygiene have been strengthened in public places across the city.

Thailand, Japan and Republic of Korea, among others, have enhanced screening measures at points of entries and implemented other public health measures to prevent importation of cases and further spread of the virus.

For more information on 2019-nCoV or other diseases, please visit <http://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/>

For medical/clinical related queries: Contact the NICD Hotline +27 82 883 9920 (for use by healthcare professionals only). Guidelines and other useful resources are available on the NICD website: www.nicd.ac.za

For more information, please contact

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