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Spot report: Mysterious virus outbreak in China, It's not SARS, so what is it?

Background



Chinese health authorities have not been able to identify a mysterious strain of pneumonia that has infected dozens of people. A total of 59 cases of unknown viral pneumonia have been reported in the city of Wuhan, central China, with seven patients in critical condition. All patients are being treated in quarantine, their close contacts are under medical observation and no deaths have been reported. About 11 patients remained in critical condition with respiratory tract infection symptoms, including fever and breathing difficulty. Investigations are still being carried out and authorities cannot yet confirm what pathogen is causing this illness. China set up an incident management team to ensure that disease detection systems are sensitive, communication channels are open, and reporting is rapid across the region. Initial lab tests showed no apparent human-to-human transmission and no medical staffs were infected, according to the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission.

Asian governments are stepping up precautionary measures to prevent an outbreak of a mysterious illness after Chinese health authorities reported cases of a "viral pneumonia of unknown origin" amid concerns that the flu-like virus is linked to the highly contagious **SARS virus** that caused hundreds of deaths in Asia and elsewhere 17 years ago. The outbreak

prompted authorities in Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Malaysia to take emergency measures, including stricter health control at borders and temperature screenings on all flights from Wuhan, in China's central Hubei Province, where the outbreak originated.

Health authorities in Hong Kong were on high alert following five cases of patients developing symptoms of respiratory infections and fever after visiting Wuhan, about four hours by train from Hong Kong. Two of the patients have been discharged from the hospital following a full recovery and a third has tested negative for SARS, influenza and avian flu. The two others are awaiting test results. Later on, no serious pneumonia cases linked to the Wuhan outbreak had been reported in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong government has rolled out new prevention measures, including a daily announcement of any suspected cases, installing additional thermal imaging systems at Hong Kong International Airport, as well as increasing steps to clean and disinfect incoming express trains and planes from Wuhan.

In Taiwan, authorities have ramped up border screening efforts of flights from Wuhan. Health officials are conducting onboard inspections and promoting health awareness before passengers are allowed to disembark. A six-year-old passenger who developed a mild fever after transferring in Wuhan is now under health monitoring at home.

Health authorities in Macao, which has two daily direct flights from Wuhan, began temperature screenings on all inbound aircraft from the city on New Year's Day. Similar measures are in place in South Korea. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention of Korea has launched an emergency center to deal with the issue.

At Singapore's Changi Airport, travelers arriving from Wuhan began undergoing temperature screenings. Suspect cases with fever and acute respiratory illness or pneumonia and with travel history to Wuhan within 14 days before the onset of symptoms will be isolated as a precautionary measure to prevent transmission.

Malaysia's Health Ministry also unveiled measures to examine fever-like symptoms at all international borders.

Actions Taken

Affected countries set emergency measures, including stricter health control at borders and temperature screenings on all flights from Wuhan, in China's central Hubei Province, where the outbreak originated.

ASSESSMENT OF NEEDS –

Severity ranking of the concerns effect in the ASEAN region.

Section	Ranking	Issues identified	Recommendations
Mysterious virus outbreak in China	G	The national authorities have reached the affected area.	The ACMM keep on monitoring and update medical information.

Remarks:

R: Severe Situation: Urgent intervention required.

Y: Situation of concern: Surveillance or assistance may or may not require, intensive monitoring

G: Relative normal situation or local Government can cope with the crisis, monitoring and no action required.

N/A: Lack of /unreliable data: Further assessment required.

ACMM Recommendations,

According to the circumstances, the ACMM is monitoring the situation closely for providing update information to member countries.

References:

1. <https://asia.nikkei.com>
2. <https://www.bbc.com>
3. <https://edition.cnn.com>
4. <https://e-today.us>
5. <http://www.thestandard.com>.