



SARS-like virus spreads in China, reaches S. Korea

BEIJING (AFP) – A mysterious SARS-like virus has killed a third person, spread around China and reached a third Asian country, authorities said Monday, fuelling fears of a major outbreak as millions begin travelling for



SARS-like virus spreads... 1 ◀

the Lunar New Year in humanity's biggest migration.

The new coronavirus strain, first discovered in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, has caused alarm because of its connection to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which killed nearly 650 people across mainland China and Hong Kong in 2002-2003.

Wuhan has 11 million inhabitants and serves as a major transport hub, including during the annual Lunar New Year holiday which begins later this week and sees hundreds of millions of Chinese people travel across the country to visit family.

A third person was confirmed to have died and 136 new cases were found over the weekend in Wuhan, the local

health commission said, taking the total number of people to have been diagnosed with the virus in China to 201.

South Korea on Monday reported its first case – a 35-year-old woman who flew in from Wuhan.

She went to hospital in Wuhan on Saturday with symptoms of a cold and was prescribed medication before flying to Incheon airport on Sunday, where she was taken into quarantine.

Her infection was confirmed on Monday, when she was in stable condition and being treated in an isolation unit at a medical facility.

"She was visiting Seoul on a tour for the Lunar New Year holidays," said KCDC director Jung Eun-kyeong, adding Korean authorities were investigat-

ing her movement on the plane and those who might have come in contact with her, including flight attendants.

Thailand and Japan have previously confirmed a total of three cases – all of whom had visited the Chinese city.

No human-to-human transmission has been confirmed so far, but authorities have previously said the possibility "cannot be excluded."

Detection measures

A seafood market is believed to be the centre of the outbreak in Wuhan, but health officials have reported that some patients had no history of contact with the facility.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) said on Twitter Monday that "an animal source seems the most likely primary source" with "some limited human-to-human transmission



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occurring between close contacts".

It said the new cases in China were the result of "increased searching and testing for (the virus) among people sick with respiratory illness."

Scientists with the MRC Centre for Global Infectious Disease Analysis at Imperial College in London warned in a paper published Friday that the number of cases in the city was likely to be closer to 1,700, much higher than the number officially identified.

Wuhan authorities said they have installed infrared thermometers at airports, railway stations and coach stations across the city. Passengers with fevers were being registered, given masks and taken to medical institutions.

State TV footage aired Monday showed medical staff working inside an isolation ward at a Wuhan hospital

in full-body suits.

Authorities in Hong Kong have also stepped up virus detection measures at border crossings, including rigorous temperature checks for inbound travelers from the Chinese mainland.

Passengers are also being screened at some airports in Thailand and the United States.

In Wuhan, 170 people are still being treated at hospital, including nine in critical condition, the city health commission said, adding that 25 people have been discharged so far.

Chinese state media moved to calm the mood as discussion about the coronavirus spreading to other Chinese cities swelled on social media.

Nationalist tabloid Global Times called for better handling of the new virus than that of the 2003 SARS outbreak.