

South Korea MERS virus cases reach 50 people

6 June 2015



MERS coronavirus particles (green) on camel epithelial cells. Credit: NIAID in collaboration with Colorado State University.

South Korea on Saturday confirmed nine more cases of the MERS virus, which has killed four people, but said it did not represent a spread of the outbreak as the infected were already in quarantine.

The additional cases brought the total number of people infected with the virus to 50.

The new cases were part of a group of 1,660 quarantined after they came into contact with people infected with the disease prior to the first case being diagnosed on May 20, the health ministry said.

"The nine people contracted the virus (in three different) hospitals and there is no evidence to suggest any transmissions in communities outside hospital settings," it said in a press statement.

Kwon Joon-Wook, a senior ministry official, told reporters Saturday that the 68-year-old man who was the first case, and his wife who contracted the virus from him, have both been cured and were released from hospital on Friday.

Two others were also waiting to be released, he said.

Four people have died since the 68-year-old man was diagnosed on May 20 after a trip to Saudi Arabia.

Consequently, more than 1,660 people who may have been exposed to the virus have been placed under varying levels of [quarantine](#).

The outbreak has forced hundreds of schools to shut their gates, thousands of people to cancel travel plans and dealt a blow to many businesses as people were told to avoid large crowds.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said on Friday it would send a team of experts to South Korea for a joint mission with the government in collecting information of the outbreak.

The team will arrive here early next week, an official of the ministry said.

The WHO has said it expects more infections in South Korea, while stressing there was currently "no evidence of sustained transmission in the community".

The virus has been sequenced in a lab and results show little genetic change from the strain of the disease detected in the Middle East, Kwon said Saturday, allaying fears that the virus could mutate and present new challenges for disease control.

"There have been no mutations in the virus," he said.

President Park Geun-Hye saw her approval ratings sink by six percentage points to 34 percent over the past week, apparently because of her government's failure to quickly quarantine infected people.

Donning the khaki-coloured uniform of the government's quick response team, Park on Friday visited a national hospital in Seoul where infected people are isolated and called for the public to put trust in her government's "all-out" efforts to fight the outbreak.

"Our response to the [outbreak](#) was made in accordance with the existing manual, but there were shortcomings in the initial response," she was quoted as saying by Yonhap news agency.

"The government is making its all-out efforts to prevent the spread of the [virus](#) and I hope the people place trust in it".

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