

Two apartment buildings in South Korea quarantined over virus

7 March 2020

Two South Korean apartment buildings heavily occupied by members of a sect linked to most of the country's coronavirus cases have been quarantined after dozens of residents tested positive for the disease, an official said Saturday.

The move comes as the country, which has the highest number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the world outside China, reported 448 new infections, taking its total to 7,041.

Six more deaths were recorded by the Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasure Headquarters, bringing the toll to 48.

The apartment complex in Daegu—the country's fourth-largest city and epicentre of its outbreak—was placed under lockdown after 46 residents were confirmed to have the virus, mayor Kwon Young-jin said.

More than 140 people live in the two buildings, including 94 members of the Shincheonji Church of Jesus, which is often accused of being a cult and is linked to more than 60 percent of South Korea's infections.

It is the first residential community in the South to be isolated over the outbreak.

The property is owned by the city government and only single women aged 35 or under can apply to live there, according to Kwon.

Over 5,000 cases have now been confirmed in Daegu—where the outbreak among Shincheonji members began with a 61-year-old woman who developed symptoms on February 10 and attended at least four worship services in the city.

Authorities are carrying out checks on more than 260,000 people associated with the religious group.

Kwon urged followers to come forward and be tested after more than 30 percent of the 709 members checked on Friday returned positive results.

Their cooperation is crucial to "prevent further infections in our community", Kwon said.

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