Numerous countries now report new cases of coronavirus infection

Moscow, February 3 (RHC)-- Russia has reported its first two cases of coronavirus that has killed over 300 people in China and prompted the World Health Organization to declare a global health emergency. Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Tatiana Golikova said the two cases were discovered in different parts of the country, one in Tyumen region in west Siberia, the other in Russia's Far East.

"They are under strict supervision, isolated and are receiving the necessary treatment. Both are Chinese citizens," she told a news conference. The two people are in a stable condition, Anna Popova, the head of Russia's consumer safety watchdog Rospotrebnadzor, told the same briefing.

Golikova said all Russian airlines, with the exception of national airline Aeroflot, have stopped flying to China from 2100 GMT on Friday. Four Chinese airlines will continue flying to Moscow, she added.

Russia has already closed its 4,300 km-long land border with China to pedestrians and vehicles in an effort to protect its population.   Golikova added that Russia had no plans to limit freight traffic with China but would restrict Chinese citizens travelling to Russia from Mongolia, in addition to restrictions already announced.

The SARS-like virus epidemic, which originated in the central Chinese city Wuhan, has spread to at least 18 countries. The World Health Organization on Thursday declared it an international public health emergency.

Thailand which has the second-highest number of cases after china, reported on Friday the first case of human-to-human transmission of the new coronavirus inside the country. Thai authorities raised the total number of cases in the country to 19. The first patient to contract the virus inside Thailand was a Thai taxi driver, said Tanarak Pipat, deputy director-general of the Department of Disease Control.

"(He) ...does not have the record of traveling to China, and it is likely that he was infected (by) a sick traveler from China," Tanarak said. "The overall risk of infection in Thailand is still low, but people should take precautions to protect themselves," Tanarak said. The taxi driver is one of five other coronavirus cases confirmed in Thailand on Friday.

Seven of the 19 cases have recovered and gone home while 12 are still being treated at hospitals. All but two of the cases are Chinese tourists visiting the country, the health authority said. There have been at least nine cases of human-to-human transmission in five countries outside China, including the United States, Germany, Japan, and now Thailand.

The World Health Organization is looking closely at cases of person-to-person transmission outside of Wuhan, which would suggest that the virus may have the potential to spread further.

The new coronavirus has also been confirmed in a child in Germany, the southern state of Bavaria said on Friday, bringing the total number of the known cases in the European country to six. The new case is a child of an employee at the same firm where four more individuals in the Munich area were infected, the state health ministry said in a statement, adding all affected persons were in stable condition.

The Italian government declared a state of emergency on Friday to fast-track efforts to prevent the spread of the deadly coronavirus strain after two cases were confirmed in Rome. Italy had said Thursday it was stopping all flights to and from China following the news that two Chinese tourists holidaying in Italy had tested positive for the virus. The couple was being treated in isolation in Rome's Spallanzani infectious diseases institute.

The state of emergency, a fairly common procedure after natural disasters like earthquakes or floods, gives regional authorities special powers and cuts red tape. It will last six months, the government said. An initial 5.3 million dollars has been allocated to tackle the virus, according to Italian media. The couple reportedly arrived in Milan and then traveled to Rome, where they started showing symptoms on Wednesday.

"The patients are doing well, they're young and it's as if they have the flu," said Giuseppe Ippolito of Spallanzani hospital. "They will remain in isolation for a few days," he told Italian radio, adding "We're almost certain there are no other infections." "The virus isn't contagious during incubation," the doctor said.

On Thursday, more than 6,000 tourists were temporarily confined aboard their cruise ship at an Italian port after two Chinese passengers fell ill. They later tested negative for the coronavirus. In response to the outbreak, Armenia's Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan wrote on social media over the weekend that his country would suspend its visa-free travel regime for Chinese citizens from February 1 until March 31 over the coronavirus outbreak.

Pakistan on Friday temporarily suspended all direct flights with China over the epidemic. In bid to prevent the spread of the coronavirus epidemic, Singapore's government also barred arrivals and transit passengers who visited China in the past 14 days, and stopped issuing all forms of new visas to Chinese passport holders.

Meanwhile, Mongolia will ban Chinese nationals and foreigners coming from the neighboring country by plane, train, or road from Saturday until March 2. Mongolians will be barred from going to China over the same period.

The travel curbs come while the WHO warned Friday that closing borders was probably ineffective in halting transmissions of the virus and could even accelerate its spread. "As we know from other scenarios, be it Ebola or other cases whenever people want to travel... if the official paths are not open, they will find unofficial paths," WHO spokesman Christian Lindmeier said in Geneva.

Oman and Bahrain on Friday joined Japan, Britain, Germany, the US, and other countries to advise against travel to China because of the coronavirus outbreak.

Authorities in Myanmar, which has no confirmed cases of the coronavirus, turned back a China Southern flight from Guangzhou with almost everyone on board on Friday after one of the passengers was found with flu symptoms similar to the fast-spreading coronavirus, a government spokesman said.

Two Myanmar nationals who also disembarked have agreed to isolate themselves in their homes for 14 days. The plane returned to Gaungzhou with everyone else on board.

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