



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



To: Editors and health journalists
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MINISTER OF HEALTH - UPDATE ON NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (2019-nCoV)

The Department of Health, South Africa, continues to closely monitor the rapidly evolving developments surrounding the Coronavirus outbreak.

We confirm that there is no case of Novel Coronavirus in South Africa.

We continue to intensify screening at all ports of entry with a particular focus on our major air ports of entry. Evidence continues to support this approach as the vast majority of cases are introduced into territories outside of China by air travelers.

Evidence continues to suggest that asymptomatic individuals are highly unlikely to transmit the virus.

There has been some emerging developments in the past twenty four hours that will need to be investigated in detail to inform our state of preparedness:

Germany has reported the first case of third generation transmission of the virus.

The first death outside of China was reported in the Philippines- the 44-year-old gentleman was a resident of Wuhan city who had travelled to the Philippines.

The virus has been cultured from stool for the first time from a patient who only presented with diarrhoea and no other symptoms. This has raised the possibility of faeco-oral transmission. The best way to prevent any infection that can be transmitted by the faeco-oral route is regular handwashing - in particular for breast or bottle feeding mothers. Therefore the message of regular hand washing cannot be stressed enough. We will very closely follow the emerging academic literature on this development.

There have been false claims that experts are encouraging people to get flu-shots to prevent Novel Coronavirus. I wish to stress that there is, at this stage, no vaccine for Novel Coronavirus although there is a lot of work going into developing a vaccine.

There is still no recommendation to restrict travel or trade with China. We have not put any restriction on travel or trade between China and South Africa although we do continue to advise that non-essential travel should be delayed until the situation abates.

The Chinese authorities keep us and the World Health Organization (WHO) regularly apprised of developments around the outbreak itself and the situation pertaining to our citizens living in China. Our Mission in China is well supported: a 24-hour telephone and online contact has been established. Food security for Wuhan City continues to be protected. We understand that the Chinese holiday and school and university holidays have been extended to limit movement between Chinese districts. Therefore we would encourage all our citizens who have been planning to go back to work or school in China to delay their return until further notice.

We wish to congratulate Universal Safety Products for their pledge to assist China to replenish their face mask stocks. We call on the private sector at large to follow this example as nations come together to fight the spread of Novel Coronavirus in the wake of the WHO proclamation of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

African countries outside of South Africa will make their own pronouncements on their response to the Novel Coronavirus and we expect that, should there be a confirmed case, we will hear from the affected country's authorities or the WHO.

Basic health prevention strategies remain the mainstay of controlling the spread of the Novel Coronavirus: avoid contact with someone that exhibits flu-like symptoms; regular hand washing; do not sneeze or cough into your hand - rather use another barrier; hygienic food preparation and not consuming undercooked or raw meat. Reliable, credible information on the Novel Coronavirus can be obtained from the WHO website and social media pages, the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) website and social media pages and the Department of Health website and social media pages. We continue to receive a high number of calls through the designated hospitals and the clinicians 24-hour hotline.

The Emergency Opening Centre remains activated.

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