

10 January 2020

Update on the cluster of pneumonia in Wuhan: novel coronavirus

ADVISORY SUMMARY:

This is an update of the previous National Health Advisory "Cluster of pneumonia of unknown cause in Wuhan, China".

WHO has not yet provided an update regarding the cause of the cluster. However Chinese national health authorities are reporting that a novel coronavirus has been associated with the cluster of pneumonia of unknown cause investigated in Wuhan.

Coronaviruses are known to cause the common cold in humans. Two coronaviruses emerged recently from a zoonotic source with the potential for human-to-human transmission and severe disease, including death: SARS and MERS. There has been no reports of significant human-to-human transmission or death associated with the novel coronavirus causing this cluster of disease.

Therefore the previous advice still applies, with additional precautions recommended in hospital settings while dealing with patients with symptoms of pneumonia and a history of travel to Wuhan:

- As per the on-going advice, travellers who become sick within a month of their arrival are encouraged to seek medical advice and contact Healthline at 0800 611 116 or a doctor and share their travel history.
- The current WHO recommendations on public health measures and surveillance of influenza and severe acute respiratory infections should be applied. WHO advises people follow the basic principles to reduce the general risk of acute respiratory infections. These are:
 - avoid close contact with people suffering acute respiratory infections
 - frequently wash hands, especially after contact with ill people or their environment
 - avoid close contact with sick live farm animals or wild animals
 - people with symptoms of acute respiratory infection should practice cough etiquette (maintain distance, cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or clothing, and wash hands).
- In addition, given the evidence that human-to-human transmission of SARS and MERS viruses is increased in hospital settings, a cautious approach with patients with symptoms of pneumonia and a history of travel to Wuhan is advised in these settings: contact and airborne precautions should be implemented in addition to standard precautions.

The Ministry continues to monitor the situation. We will update our advice as further information becomes available.

Background information:

As of 5 January 2020, a total of 59 patients with pneumonia of unknown cause have been reported to WHO by the national authorities in China. The cases are clustered in Wuhan. Of the 59 cases reported, 7 are severely ill, while the remaining patients are in stable condition. No death has been reported.

According to reports from China, a novel coronavirus was detected in 15 of the people in the cluster.

According to the authorities, some cases were operating dealers or vendors in the Huanan Seafood market. The reported link to this wholesale fish and live animal market could indicate an exposure link to animals. The causal agent has not yet been identified.

Based on the preliminary information from the Chinese investigation team, no evidence of significant human-to-human transmission and no health care worker infections have been reported so far.

According to media reports, the concerned market in Wuhan was closed on 1 January 2020 for environmental sanitation and disinfection.

Wuhan is currently in the winter season. The symptoms reported among the patients are common to several respiratory diseases, and pneumonia and other respiratory diseases are common in the winter season.

WHO has requested further information from national authorities to assess the risk.