

SA beefs up surveillance amid coronavirus outbreak

The National Health Department says while there is no cause for panic with the outbreak of the novel coronavirus in China, it has beefed up surveillance at the country's ports of entry.



Wuhan, China, the epicentre of the Novel coronavirus. Image source: Getty/Gallo

“South Africans are assured that measures are in place to detect, manage and contain any cases of novel coronavirus should it come to our shores.

“So far, there are no suspected cases reported. However, due to the current risk of importation of inadvertent cases of 2019-nCoV from Wuhan City – China, Port Health authorities have enhanced surveillance of all travellers from Asia, especially China,” said Health Department spokesperson Popo Maj

OR Tambo and Cape Town International Airports are the only ports of entry with direct flights from Asia.

Symptoms include fever and a cough with a few patients presenting with difficulty in breathing and bilateral infiltrates on chest X-rays.

In a bid to keep the virus at bay, South Africa has developed and distributed clinical guidelines and case definitions to doctors and nurses in both the public and the private sectors. These include information on how to diagnosis and respond to a possible 2019-nCoV case.

“Provinces have activated outbreak response teams and are on high alert to detect and manage inadvertent cases that may arrive in the country,” said Maja.

No restrictions on travel to China

Based on currently available information, the World Health Organisation has not recommended any restriction of travel or trade.

“However, the department advises travellers to Wuhan should avoid contact with animals and are encouraged to practice good hand hygiene and cough etiquette in order to reduce the risk of infection with respiratory viruses,” said Maja.

The Health Department also urged the following precautionary measures:

- Avoiding close contact with people suffering from acute respiratory infections.
- Practice frequent hand-washing, especially after direct contact with ill people or their environment.
- Avoid visiting markets where live animals are sold.
- Travellers with symptoms of acute respiratory infection should practice cough etiquette (maintain distance, cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or clothing and wash hands).
- Health practitioners should provide travellers with information to reduce the general risk of acute respiratory infections, via travel health clinics, travel agencies, conveyance operators and at points of entry.

In case of symptoms suggestive of respiratory illness before, during or after travel, the department advise travellers to seek medical attention and share travel history with their healthcare provider.

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