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Epidemic response command center set up

By Lee I-chia and Shelley Shan / Staff reporters



Taiwan yesterday set up an epidemic response command center to contain the spread of a new coronavirus, which was first discovered in Wuhan, China.

With the novel coronavirus 2019 (2019-nCoV) infection spreading to other Asian nations and many people expected to return from China during the Lunar New Year holiday, the Executive Yuan yesterday afternoon approved a Centers for Disease Control (CDC) plan to establish a level 3 National Health Command Center, CDC Director-General Chou Jih-haw (周志浩) said.

The command center, led by Chou, is to be in charge of holding cross-ministerial discussions to improve preventive measures against “severe pneumonia with novel pathogens” in the nation.



An undated photograph shows a public health notice prepared by the Nantou County Government on the novel coronavirus 2019.

Photo courtesy of the Nantou County Government

Taiwan currently has 44 million surgical masks and 1.9 million N95 masks, more than enough to meet demand, Chou said.

The CDC urged passengers returning from Wuhan or nearby areas who have a fever, cough or other illnesses, to report to the CDC's airport quarantine stations regardless of whether they have taken medicine to relieve the symptoms.

People who develop a fever or respiratory symptoms within 14 days after returning from Wuhan or nearby areas should also report it to the CDC's hotline (1922), wear a surgical mask and seek immediate medical attention.

A new confirmed case of a passenger from Wuhan detected with "severe pneumonia with novel pathogens" was reported on Sunday, CDC Deputy Director-General Chuang Jen-hsiang (莊人祥) said

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yesterday.

The boy had a fever and diarrhea when he arrived from Wuhan, Chuang said.

He was not exposed to livestock and had not visited the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in Wuhan, but his symptoms met the clinical definition for severe pneumonia with novel pathogens that necessitated a mandatory report to the CDC, Chuang said.

The boy tested negative for influenza viruses and also negative for 2019-nCoV in the first test, and he is to undergo a second test for the 2019-nCoV today, he added.

Another case reported on Saturday showed negative results for 2019-nCoV in two tests and was found to be an influenza type A (H3N2) virus infection, he said.

Separately, the Ministry of Transportation and Communications said that ministry officials overseeing airports, seaports, airlines and tourism have been asked to be on alert and work closely with the CDC on inspection and quarantine efforts at border controls to prevent the spread of the virus from China.

The Civil Aeronautics Administration on Sunday officially notified Taiwanese airlines, as well as those in China, Hong Kong and Macau offering flights to and from Taiwan, that they should broadcast information onboard about the virus before landing in the nation, the ministry said.

All Taiwanese airlines and five Hong Kong and Macau-based airlines have started airing such

information on board, it added.

Shandong Airlines (山東航空) said it would start broadcasting such information on Thursday next week, the ministry said, adding that other Chinese airlines are waiting for the instructions from headquarters on when the broadcast would be available.

For flights arriving from Wuhan, both the jet bridges and flight arrival areas would be sterilized after all cabin crew have disembarked from the plane, the ministry said.

The Tourism Bureau has also informed the Travel Agents' Association, the Association of Tour Managers and other travel associations that it has issued a "yellow" alert for areas surrounding Wuhan per instructions from the Mainland Affairs Council, meaning that the public should beware of their own safety and reconsider whether the trip is necessary, the ministry said.

The associations should ensure that cross-strait travelers and travel agents are aware of the disease and take precautionary actions to avoid contracting it, the ministry said.

Information about the disease would be shown at airports and seaports using multimedia electronic bulletin boards, news tickers and print advertisements, it said.

Airports and seaports should also have cleaning and sterilizing procedures to contain the spread of the disease once the CDC has identified passengers who might have contracted the disease, it added.

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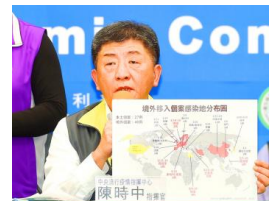


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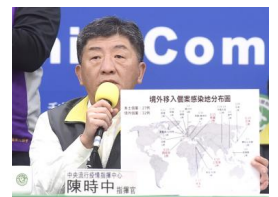


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