

South Korea most effectively contained the COVID-19 outbreak, as seen by the sharp leveling off of the number of COVID-19 cases in the country. South Korea's quick and aggressive response to COVID-19 can be attributed to a number of factors: MERS, contact tracing, new laws, and technology.

In 2015, a Korean businessman returned from the Middle East with a fever, cough, and pneumonia, and was later diagnosed with MERS, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome. It was hard for officials to try to trace his movements because they didn't know who was infected or where the people who were infected had been. This illness killed 36 of the 186 cases in South Korea. Through MERS, South Korea learned about the importance of diagnostic tests and basic infection prevention measures. When South Korea had reported about 30 coronavirus cases, the government immediately took action and started working with biotech companies to develop a test for the virus and had thousands of kits ready to be distributed to various hospitals. By February, cases rapidly rose to 3000. Because of South Korea's preparation, a woman who was tested positive had her movement traced. She went to church for an hour and officials were able to track down those who were in contact with her, many of whom tested positive soon later and were isolated. Soon after its testing measures, cases rose to about 9000. They then ramped up testing around the country by having private and national healthcare systems join forces, offering 20,000 people a day free testing for over 600 locations, a per-capita rate 40 times that from the United States. They traced positive people and their contacts on a large scale. After failing to trace MERS effectively in 2015, new laws were passed to allow the government to collect patients' data and security footage during an outbreak. This allowed them to alert the public of where infected people have been and to avoid those areas via phone alerts and applications. Many South Korean citizens have accepted that they must sacrifice a loss of privacy in exchange for data that can be used to track the virus to keep the public safe. Also, in recent efforts to contain the COVID-19 outbreak, every traveler as of April 1 is placed in mandatory quarantine for 14 days, according to the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Those who fail to comply with regulations may be imprisoned for up to a year or fined up to 10 million won, while foreigners risk facing deportation.