

Itaewon-linked COVID-19 cases flatten

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A temporary closure notice is posted at the window of a bar near Hongik University in Seoul, Sunday, as the bar was visited by a COVID-19 patient. / Yonhap

By Jun Ji-hye

The country's COVID-19 infections linked to nightclubs in Seoul's Itaewon area have been showing signs of a slowdown over the weekend, after the first case was reported in early May, according to the health authorities Sunday.

But the authorities are staying on alert over the possibility of further infections as the virus' incubation period has yet to have passed.

The Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC) detected 13 new cases of the coronavirus, Saturday, bringing the country's total to 11,050.

It marked the fewest daily cases since the popular nightlife district emerged as an infection cluster.

Of the 13 new cases, five were traced to the Itaewon nightclubs.

The KCDC said later in the day that two more cases linked to the nightclubs were reported as of 12 p.m., bringing the total number of related cases to 168.

Of the 168 patients, 89 visited the nightclubs, and the remaining 79 were either family members or acquaintances.

By age, patients in their 20s accounted for the largest portion at 102, followed by 27 in their 30s.

The new wave of infections began after a 29-year-old Korean patient tested positive for the coronavirus, May 6, after visiting five nightclubs and bars in Itaewon from the night of May 1 to the early hours of May 2.

The new infections came after the spread of the coronavirus in Korea was showing clear signs of a slowdown.

In a bid to prevent the further spread of the virus, KCDC Director Jung Eun-kyeong stressed the need for people who visited nightclubs and bars located in Itaewon between April 24 and May 6 to refrain from going out and undergo coronavirus tests regardless of whether they showed symptoms.

"In particular, it is positively necessary for those who work at educational, religious, indoor sports and medical facilities to go through the virus tests as there is a high risk of the spread of the virus," Jung said during a media briefing.

Jung noted that it was necessary to monitor the development of the situation for at least another week, citing the coronavirus' incubation period that is believed to be roughly two weeks.

"It is also necessary to enhance quarantine measures for entertainment facilities, bars and bowling alleys that are visited by many young people in their 20s and 30s," Jung said.