

'Noraebang' emerge as infection routes in Seoul

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Some recent infections linked to nightspots in the Seoul neighborhood of Itaewon were found to have spread through karaoke (or Noraebang in Korean) facilities. Korea Times file

Some recent infections linked to nightspots in the Seoul neighborhood of Itaewon were found to have spread through karaoke (or Noraebang in Korean) facilities, highlighting the need for added caution at entertainment facilities.

A city official said Monday that health authorities have identified a link between recent infections at the university district of Hongdae, western Seoul, and cases linked to nightclubs and bars in Itaewon.

"We believe that the five cases confirmed (in relation) to bars in Mapo Ward are linked to cases that were confirmed after visits to Itaewon clubs," Na Baeg-ju, the city's civil health bureau director, said in a press briefing.

Na explained that one of the Hongdae-related patients had visited a "noraebang," a karaoke facility, in the southwestern Seoul ward of Gwanak, just three minutes apart from an Itaewon clubber.

The Hongdae and Itaewon cases were previously considered to have come from separate infection routes.

The latest finding raises concerns over additional infections at karaoke facilities.

A chain transmission has been reported at another noraebang in the northeastern Seoul ward of Dobong, where an acquaintance of an Itaewon clubber had visited.

Na said the patients used different rooms in the Dobong karaoke, but that the rooms were found to have used the same air ventilation system.

Related cases are expected to further rise when health authorities track down visitors at other karaoke facilities the patients visited.

South Korea has reported 148 cases in relation to the Itaewon case, with reports of secondary and tertiary transmissions increasing in the past few days. (Yonhap)