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## Briefing on the pan-governmental meeting for COVID-19

- Current status of and future plan for the response to COVID-19, plans to secure more beds and healthcare staff for each region, etc.

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- ☐ President Moon Jae-in presided over the pan-governmental meeting for COVID-19 today, which ▲ raised the nation's infectious disease alert to the highest level, ▲ announced the current status of and future plan for the response to COVID-19, and ▲ discussed plans to secure more beds and healthcare staff for each region and to utilize them step-by-step.

### 1 Infectious disease alert raised to the highest level

- ☐ Previously, Korea's infectious disease alert remained at the second highest level, but all-out measures had been taken by the Central Emergency Response System (headed by the Director of KCDC) and

IMS (headed by the Minister of Health and Welfare) based on the highest alert level.

- At today's meeting, the government decided to drastically fortify the response system by **raising the infectious disease alert to the highest level as a preemptive measure against the possible national spread of COVID-19.**
  - This move is based on the judgment that, although community spread is still in a preliminary stage centering on a specific region and group, **a preemptive response for a possible national spread is viewed as critical considering the current rate of spread.**
- While maintaining the existing system of infection control led by **the Central Emergency Response System** and supported by IMS, it will be raised to **the Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasure Headquarters headed by the Prime Minister** (First Deputy Head: Minister of Health and Welfare; Second Deputy Head: Minister of the Interior and Safety).
  - It was decided to **take unprecedentedly powerful all-out measures in the most prompt manner free from regulations by stepping up pan-ministerial support and cooperation between the central and local governments.**
- In the highest alert level, the government is tasked with **blocking the entry of COVID-19 from overseas, taking quarantine measures such as the isolation of patients and contacts, and pushing ahead with strategies to prevent and minimize community spread.**
- This decision was finalized through the government's discussion and the **KCDC's crisis assessment meeting** and issued by the Minister of Health and Welfare.

- The government revealed that more stringent responses would be carried out in the highest alert level to more aggressively block the spread of the virus.
- First, all Daegu citizens were requested to voluntarily refrain from leaving their homes or moving around for at least two weeks. Those displaying symptoms were requested to undergo testing at screening clinics as soon as possible.
  - Citizens visiting Daegu from other regions were also requested to take the same steps as Daegu citizens.
- The government plans to designate hospitals dedicated to mild cases of COVID-19 infection for expedited treatment and secure more beds.
  - The government will designate national infectious disease hospitals for different cities and provinces and transfer all existing patients within one week to secure about 1,000 beds for confirmed cases in Daegu and 10,000 beds on a national level.
- The government also stated that it requested medical and pharmaceutical organizations of different cities and provinces to provide more healthcare specialists for early detection and specimen collection concerning patients with mild respiratory symptoms and patient treatment, and it is making preparations to station them on the front lines.
  - The government promised to provide sufficient benefits and compensation support for healthcare specialists who cooperate in the prevention of the spread of the virus.
- Lastly, the government recommended the public to refrain from participating in events held in tight indoor venues and attended by

large groups of people and to stay at home when a fever, respiratory symptoms, etc., are detected.

- The government urged **employers** to cooperate closely and **permit** leaves of absence without a written diagnosis.

## 2 Current status of and future plan for COVID-19 response

- COVID-19 infections are spreading rapidly in Daegu and the Gyeongsangbuk-do regions due to a certain organization, with a number of patients without a definitive epidemiological connection confirmed as positive. The community spread of the virus has already begun in some regions.
- The COVID-19 outbreak is expected to last for a substantial period of time in mainland China, and the possibility of the entry of the virus from a country other than China still remains high.
- As such, the government decided to continue the measures to block the entry of COVID-19 from China and other regions with confirmed outbreaks.
  - Entry restriction measures, such as the prohibition of entry of foreigners from Hubei, suspension of the validity of visas issued by the Consulate General in Wuhan, and visa review reinforcement (for mainland China), will continue, as well as the special immigration procedures\* for inbound travelers from China.
- \* Entry permitted after the location of residence and contact information are confirmed, and 14 days of monitoring via the self-diagnosis app required
- We recommend the cancellation of travel to regions of major outbreaks and continue to provide access to the travel history monitoring system to healthcare providers and pharmacies to block the entry of the virus from a country other than China.

- ☐ We will take aggressive infection control measures to contain the community spread in Daegu and the Gyeongsangbuk-do regions.
- To ensure early patient detection, the number of screening clinics will be expanded and mobile specimen collection teams and mobile clinics will be operated. We will continually take steps to reinforce diagnostic testing competence and newly add COVID-19 to the existing respiratory disease monitoring system.
- To block infection within healthcare institutions, pneumonia patients will undergo COVID-19 diagnostic testing prior to hospitalization or entry into the ICU. Diagnostic testing for suspected cases that visit the emergency center will be conducted in isolated spaces.
- In order to help the public receive hospital treatment safely, we will launch the "public reassurance hospital program" (application submitted from February 22 onwards), which specifies the complete separation of the zone for respiratory disease patients and non-respiratory disease patients while enabling patients to consult physicians and receive prescriptions via telephone, etc., without physically visiting healthcare providers.
- Beds and healthcare staff will be additionally secured for each region, and for those regions experiencing drastic outbreaks, the central government will coordinate resources among regions and provide beds, healthcare staff, and equipment. Treatment competence will also be continually reinforced, and compensation will be provided to healthcare institutions to offset any losses incurred by taking part in diagnosis and treatment.
- ☐ Daegu and Cheongdo will be intensively managed as a "special infectious disease control region", with every possible infection control measure taken.



- The Daegu government acquired the list of **all high-risk people** who attended the religious gathering and put them **under self-isolation and diagnostic testing**.
- To address the shortage of beds, 156 beds at Daegu Medical Center and Keimyung University Dongsan Hospital were secured first, and **453 more will be made available** by designating Daegu Medical Center as a national infectious disease hospital (February 21) and transferring existing patients to other healthcare institutions. If the shortage continues, a public hospital in Daegu (Daegu Veterans Hospital) will be designated another national infectious disease hospital, as well as the Red Cross hospital nearby. Armed Forces Daejeon Hospital's negative-pressure beds will also be utilized.
- To address the shortage of resources, **162 public healthcare specialists**, including physicians and nurses of public and military hospitals and public health doctors, as well as **protective gear and diagnostic testing equipment will be provided**.
- To stabilize the situation in Daegu as quickly as possible, we plan to exert a concerted effort with healthcare circles, local communities, and government ministries and mobilize all possible treatment resources for diagnostic testing of potential cases with symptoms, as well as healthcare staff and equipment.
- The Gyeongsangbuk-do government **conducted diagnostic testing** on all patients and staff members of Daenam Hospital in Cheongdo.
- **Daenam Hospital** was converted to **an isolation treatment hospital to treat hospitalized patients in the psychiatric ward**, and other confirmed cases are to be transferred to the National Medical Center, etc.
- To remain prepared for additional outbreaks, four local infectious

disease hospitals were designated (Andong, Pohang, Gimcheon, and Ulsan Medical Centers). Existing inpatients will be **transferred to other healthcare institutions to secure up to 900 beds.**

- In response to the situation, 20 experts from the National Mental Health Center and one from NHIS Ilsan Hospital were sent to the site, as well as **medial equipment such as Level D protection suits.**

- ☐ The **pan-governmental special support teams** were dispatched to **Daegu and Cheongdo** to readily provide support on a governmental level.
- The team dispatched to Daegu on February 20 has conducted diverse support activities on-site. Another team was dispatched to Cheongdo on February 22.
- ☐ IMS Head Park Neung-hoo said, "We are working to convert to a **community-centered response system in preparation for the community spread of the virus through ensuring early virus detection and offering optimized treatment,** in addition to engaging in continued activities to block the entry of the virus. We urge the public to **have confidence in the decisions of the authorities and actively take part in our infection control measures,** such as adherence to the code of conduct for infection prevention."

### 3 Plan to secure and utilize patient beds and healthcare staff

- ☐ Patients with respiratory diseases such as COVID-19 have been allocated one negative-pressure room each. Currently, 1,077 negative-pressure beds are being operated at public and private hospitals across the nation, **among which 394 are occupied and 683 are available** (as of February 22).
- However, most regions, other than some including Seoul, are equipped

with less than 30 beds. As such, if multiple confirmed cases occur in these regions, they may not be able to accommodate patients.

- At today's meeting, the government announced its measures ▲ to continually expand the number of negative-pressure beds for serious cases, ▲ to secure 10,000 beds at city- and province-level infectious disease hospitals for mild cases, and ▲ to designate more national infectious disease hospitals and secure beds and healthcare staff dedicated to COVID-19.
- We plan to continually expand the number of negative-pressure beds using portable negative-pressure units for serious cases. We will utilize all currently unused negative-pressure units stored at healthcare institutions and public health centers across the nation and provide financial aid to purchase additionally needed units.
- As many as 10,000 beds will be additionally secured by designating more infectious disease hospitals in cities and provinces for mild cases. In preparation for the outbreak of multiple confirmed cases within the community, we designated 43 local hospitals and public hospitals as national infectious disease hospitals and delivered the order on February 21 to transfer all existing patients to other healthcare institutions by February 28.
  - Sufficient compensation will be provided for any losses incurred to the designated hospitals. IMS officials (manager-level) have been dispatched to cities and provinces to monitor the current status and conduct on-site inspections (since February 21). On-site monitoring of the status for different regions will be actively carried out throughout the future.
- In order to secure more beds in addition to those at regional infectious disease hospitals, the National Medical Center and Armed Forces



Daejeon Hospital were designated as national infectious disease hospitals (February 20), to which hospitalized patients have been transferred. The government is working to designate more national and public hospitals (Masan National Tuberculosis Hospital, Daegu Veterans Hospital, COMWEL Daegu Hospital, and Yeongju and Sangju Red Cross Hospitals) as national infectious disease hospitals.

- ☐ For confirmed cases, available beds in the respective region (city or province) are to be allocated with priority. If multiple outbreaks occur in a certain region, IMS will coordinate the allocation of hospital beds.
- ☐ We will join hands with regional healthcare experts to adequately secure necessary healthcare staff, and the central government will take support measures such as dispatching public healthcare workers to account for any shortages.
- ☐ IMS Head Park Neung-hoo said, "Korea is equipped with the world's best healthcare system, staff, and technology for COVID-19 response, and the public can rest assured." He added, "We would like to thank the healthcare staff who are sparing no efforts on the front lines to protect the health of the Korean people."