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Subject: PRO/AH/EDR> Undiagnosed pneumonia - China (HU) (03): updates, SARS, MERS ruled out, WHO, RFI

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UNDIAGNOSED PNEUMONIA - CHINA (HUBEI) (03): UPDATES, SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME, MIDDLE EAST RESPIRATORY SYNDROME RULED OUT, WHO, REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

A ProMED-mail post

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- [1] Pneumonia of unknown cause - WHO 5 Jan 2020

Date: 5 Jan 2020

Source: WHO Emergencies preparedness, response, Disease Outbreak News, 5 Jan 2019 [edited]

<https://www.who.int/csr/don/05-january-2020-pneumonia-of-unkown-cause-china/en/>

On [31 Dec 2019], the WHO China Country Office was informed of cases of pneumonia of unknown etiology (unknown cause) detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China. As of [3 Jan 2020], a total of 44 patients

with pneumonia of unknown etiology have been reported to WHO by the national authorities in China. Of the 44 cases reported, 11 are severely ill, while the remaining 33 patients are in stable condition. According to media reports, the concerned market in Wuhan was closed on [1 Jan 2020] for environmental sanitation and disinfection.

The causal agent has not yet been identified or confirmed. On [1 Jan 2020], WHO requested further information from national authorities to assess the risk.

National authorities report that all patients are isolated and receiving treatment in Wuhan medical institutions. The clinical signs and symptoms are mainly fever, with a few patients having difficulty in breathing, and chest radiographs showing invasive lesions of both lungs.

According to the authorities, some patients were operating dealers or vendors in the Huanan Seafood market. Based on the preliminary information from the Chinese investigation team, no evidence of significant human-to-human transmission and no health care worker infections have been reported.

Public Health Response

National authorities have reported the following response measures:

- 121 close contacts have been identified and are under medical observation;
- The follow-up of close contacts is ongoing;
- Pathogen identification and the tracing of the cause are underway;
- Wuhan Municipal Health Commission carried out active case finding, and retrospective investigations have been completed;
- Environmental sanitation and further hygiene investigations are underway.

WHO is closely monitoring the situation and is in close contact with national authorities in China.

WHO risk assessment

There is limited information to determine the overall risk of this reported cluster of pneumonia of unknown etiology. The reported link to a wholesale fish and live animal market could indicate an exposure link to animals. The symptoms reported among the patients are common to several respiratory diseases, and pneumonia is common in the winter season; however, the occurrence of 44 cases of pneumonia requiring hospitalization clustered in space and time should be handled prudently.

Wuhan city, with a population of 19 million, is the capital city of Hubei province, with a population of 58 million people. WHO has requested further information on the laboratory tests performed and the differential diagnoses considered.

WHO advice

Based on information provided by national authorities, WHO's recommendations on public health measures and surveillance of influenza and severe acute respiratory infections still apply.

WHO does not recommend any specific measures for travellers. In case of symptoms suggestive of respiratory illness either during or after travel, travellers are encouraged to seek medical attention and share travel history with their healthcare provider.

WHO advises against the application of any travel or trade restrictions on China based on the current information available on this event.

For more information:

Infection prevention and control of epidemic-and pandemic prone acute respiratory infections in health care, WHO guidelines: (https://www.who.int/csr/bioriskreduction/infection_control/publication/en/)

Wuhan Municipal Health Commission briefing on the pneumonia epidemic situation, 31 Dec 2019 (in Mandarin):

<http://wjw.wuhan.gov.cn/front/web/showDetail/2019123108989>

Wuhan Municipal Health Commission briefing on the pneumonia epidemic situation 3 Jan 2020 (in Mandarin):

<http://wjw.wuhan.gov.cn/front/web/showDetail/2020010309017>.

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Communicated by:

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[2] Wuhan Municipal Health and Health Committee's Report on Unexplained Viral Pneumonia

Date: 5 Jan 2020

Source: Wuhan Public Health Commission Press Release [machine trans. edited]

<http://wjw.wuhan.gov.cn/front/web/showDetail/2020010509020>

Wuhan Municipal Health and Health Committee's Report on Unexplained Viral Pneumonia

Issuing authority: Wuhan City health committee | Published: 2020-01-05 20:33:24

Since [31 Dec 2019], our committee has carried out search and retrospective investigation of viral pneumonia

cases of unknown cause in the city. As of 8:00 on [5 Jan 2020], a total of 59 patients with unexplained diagnosis of viral pneumonia were reported in our city, including 7 critically ill patients, and the remaining patients' overall vital signs were stable. At present, all patients are being isolated in medical institutions in Wuhan Treatment with no deaths. Among the 59 patients, the earliest onset of the case was [12 Dec 2019], and the latest onset was [29 Dec 2019]; 163 close contacts have been followed up for medical observation, and the follow-up of close contacts is still in progress.

An epidemiological survey showed that some patients were operating households in Wuhan South China Seafood City (South China Seafood Wholesale Market). As of now, preliminary investigations have shown no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission and no medical staff infections. Respiratory pathogens such as influenza, avian influenza, adenovirus, infectious atypical pneumonia (SARS) and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) have been excluded. Pathogen identification and cause tracing are still underway.

At present, with the support of the state and Hubei Province, Wuhan has adopted the following main prevention and control measures:

- 1st, to treat patients with all its strength.
- The 2nd is to carry out isolation treatment for all cases.
- The 3rd is to continue to conduct relevant case searches and retrospective investigations in medical institutions throughout the city.
- The 4th is to carry out close contact tracking seriously, implement medical observation on the close contacts that have been tracked according to regulations, and have not found any abnormal symptoms such as fever.
- 5th, we will take measures to suspend the market for South China Seafood City and carry out environmental sanitation and further hygiene investigations.
- 6th, actively carry out epidemiological investigations.
- 7th, cooperate with the state and province to carry out pathogen identification (including nucleic acid detection and virus isolation and cultivation) and trace the cause, and prevention and control work is proceeding in an orderly manner.

Experts suggest that the city is currently in the season of high incidence of infectious diseases in winter and spring. Citizens should pay attention to maintaining indoor air circulation to avoid closed and airless public places and crowded places. Wear masks when necessary. If you have fever, respiratory infection symptoms, especially persistent fever, go to a medical institution in time.

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Communicated by:

ProMED-mail Rapporteur Kunihiko Iizuka

[3] Singapore suspected case, RSV [Respiratory Syncytial Virus] identified - media report

Date: 4 Jan 2020

Source: Straits Times [edited]

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/wuhan-pneumonia-first-suspect-case-identified-here>

The Ministry of Health said on Saturday [4 Jan 2020] that it had been notified of the 1st suspected case of the mystery Wuhan virus here, involving a 3-year-old girl from China who had pneumonia and a travel history to the Chinese city of Wuhan. She had been warded for further assessment and treatment, and isolated as a precautionary measure, said the ministry.

Countries have grown concerned over a viral outbreak in Wuhan marked by unusual cases of pneumonia. These appear to be linked to a wholesale seafood market there, where not just seafood is sold, but also live animals, including, reportedly, birds and snakes, and the organs of rabbits and other wildlife.

At least 44 people had been affected there; and 11 were seriously ill, raising the spectre of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), which hit Singapore hard in 2003.

Singapore has started temperature screening for passengers arriving from the city at Changi Airport, and doctors are on the lookout for possible cases. Experts, however, say that there have been no reports of human-to-human transmission, which means much less risk to the public.

The girl in Singapore was in stable condition, MOH said, without giving details on how the case had been uncovered.

It noted that she had not visited the Huanan seafood wholesale market in Wuhan associated with the cluster of pneumonia cases.

Preliminary tests also showed that she was positive for respiratory syncytial virus, MOH added, which is a common cause of childhood pneumonia.

Investigations are ongoing to confirm this as the cause.

Coordinating Minister for Infrastructure and the Transport Minister Khaw Boon Wan said on Saturday [4 Jan 2020] that Singapore is monitoring the pneumonia situation in Wuhan closely.

"There is no evidence of person-to-person transmission so will likely be just a normal fever outbreak," he wrote in a Facebook post. "But after SARS in 2003, we cannot be complacent."

There are 2 airlines connecting directly to Wuhan, he said: Scoot and Urumqi Airlines, and the 1st temperature screening at T1 for a Scoot flight, an uneventful one, was done on Saturday morning [4 Jan 2020].

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Communicated by:

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[4] Hong Kong 8 more suspected cases, none with "unidentified strain" - media report

Date: 5 Jan 2020

Source: South China Morning Post [edited]

<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/health-environment/article/3044723/six-more-hong-kong-patients-hospitalised-over>

Authorities in Wuhan announced on Sunday [5 Jan 2020] that 59 people had been admitted to hospital with an unidentified form of pneumonia, up from 44 on Friday [3 Jan 2020], while 9 more patients were found with fever or respiratory symptoms after returning to Hong Kong from the city in central China.

In Singapore, the Ministry of Health earlier said it had been informed of a suspected case, involving a 3-year-old girl from China who had pneumonia and a history of travel to Wuhan.

Health authorities in the mainland city said on Sunday [5 Jan 2020] night that the virus was not severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) or MERS (Middle East respiratory syndrome) but that a final identification of the strain was still in progress.

Although the total number of infections had increased, there were fewer people in serious condition, falling to 7 from 11, according to a statement on the website of the Wuhan Municipal Commission. At least 163 people who had been in close contact with those infected were placed under medical observation. A seafood market in the Hubei province city was the site of the outbreak.

The authorities had previously ruled out common flu, avian flu, adenovirus infection and other common respiratory diseases. Further laboratory tests and investigations were underway.

The commission added that a preliminary investigation found no evidence of human-to-human transmission, and none of the medical staff had been infected. Some of the patients are vendors at the same seafood market, which has already been shut down and sanitised, it said.

Hong Kong's Centre for Health Protection (CHP) said public hospitals had admitted 8 more patients, including a boy, 9, and a 2-year-old girl, in the 24 hours to noon on Sunday [5 Jan 2020] with fever, respiratory infection or pneumonia symptoms who had also been to Wuhan in the past 14 days. At least 7 of them confirmed that they had not been to any wet market there.

The patients were all in stable condition. Apart from the 2 children, the other new cases reported involved 4 men and 2 women, aged between 22 and 55. The 9-year-old boy, who was seen by a private doctor, was the latest suspected case revealed.

All patients were quarantined and being treated in Queen Elizabeth, Princess Margaret, Ruttonjee, Tseung Kwan O and United Christian hospitals. Four were confirmed to have flu or other related illnesses, while the others were waiting for test results.

Meanwhile, Chinese University's student union said a 20-year-old female student residing in a United College dormitory was hospitalised for suspected pneumonia symptoms. It was understood she had travelled to Wuhan recently. A university spokeswoman said the student returned to Hong Kong on [29 Dec 2019] and developed symptoms on Saturday [4 Jan 2020]. She and her roommate were sent to hospital for further checks.

That takes the total number of suspected cases reported in the city to 17. But, of 8 other cases reported by Saturday [4 Jan 2020] evening, none of the patients were found to have the unidentified strain. The Hospital Authority said at least 5 people among all those identified as suspected cases had been discharged from hospital.

"The [Hong Kong] government has been continuously in close contact with the relevant mainland authorities for the latest updates ... people are also reminded not to visit the wet market or eat wild animals when travelling," Secretary for Food and Health Sophia Chan Siu-chee said.

Chan also said local authorities had adopted an active response to the incident. The health minister visited the infectious disease centre at Princess Margaret Hospital on Saturday [4 Jan 2020] and discussed response policies with medical staff.

A new response mechanism for infectious diseases was launched by the Hong Kong government on Saturday [4 Jan 2020], and it was set to a "serious" level, the 2nd on a 3-tier scale beginning with an alert and ending with

an emergency declared at its peak. Doctors are required to report patient cases with fever and acute respiratory symptoms or pneumonia symptoms who had visited Wuhan within 14 days before the onset of the illness, whether or not they had visited any wet markets or seafood markets there.

Wuhan authorities announced on Friday [3 Jan 2020] that 44 people had been admitted to hospital with the unidentified virus, up from 27 on Tuesday [31 Jan 2020]. Professor David Hui Shu-cheong, a Chinese University respiratory medicine expert, believed the new cases might not have a direct connection with the wet market in Wuhan, but it was necessary to isolate the patients as a precaution. Hui also said the government should consider further strengthening screening measures on travellers from Wuhan, especially if there were possible risks of a community outbreak there. "For instance, [the government] can install extra screening facilities on the platforms at the West Kowloon high-speed rail terminus. If there are any passengers who have been to Wuhan, they should be screened," he said.

On Saturday [4 Jan 2020], a voluntary lane at the West Kowloon terminus dedicated for travellers from Wuhan was unused, even as passengers got off a train that had stopped in the city. Chan said while not all passengers on trains that stopped in Wuhan had necessarily visited the city, the government would continue to liaise with personnel at each boundary control point to step up quarantine measures.

In a statement issued late on Sunday [5 Jan 2020], the Centre for Health Protection said it had received notification from the mainland's National Health Commission on the latest information about the Wuhan cases.

"While the causative pathogen and cause of infection are still under investigation, respiratory pathogens including influenza viruses, avian influenza viruses, adenovirus, Severe acute respiratory syndrome [SARS] and Middle East respiratory syndrome have been ruled out," it said.

"According to the risk assessment of the World Health Organisation, the reported link of this cluster of pneumonia of unknown aetiology to a wholesale fish and live animal market could indicate an exposure link to animals." Macau has reported 4 cases of patients who had recently been to Wuhan and developed suspected pneumonia symptoms, but all have been confirmed to be flu or other common viruses.

Meanwhile, as flu season approaches its peak between January and March 2020, Chan said about 1.15 million doses of flu vaccination had been administered since last October [2019], according to figures by the Department of Health, nearly an 18 per cent increase year on year and a rise especially among children. The health minister said flu activity was still below baseline level, but also noted that flu vaccination rates among people aged 50 to 64 was not as satisfactory despite the government previously rolling out a subsidy scheme targeting the group.

[Byline: Chan Ho-him and Jun Mai]

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Communicated by:

ProMED-mail Rapporteur Kunihiro Iizuka

[First, our thanks go to subscribers for submitting multiple sources of information providing the current updates. Special thanks go to Greg Folkers (<gfolkers@nih.gov>) and Mary Marshall <mjm2020@googlemail.com> and ProMED-mail Rapporteur Kunihiro Iizuka. Where official source reports were available, they were chosen as a documentation of the information available to date (and match the media sources reporting on the same findings).

According to the latest official report from the Wuhan Public Health Committee, there are now 59 cases identified in the outbreak originally associated with contact with the Wuhan Seafood Market. There is definitive ruling out of the SARS-CoV (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus) and MERS-CoV (Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus) as etiologic agents for the observed cases. What is not ruled out is identification of another possible coronavirus as yet not identified associated with human respiratory disease. Nor has there been mention of ruling out legionellosis, infection with *Legionella* spp. bacteria, which can produce a predominantly febrile illness (Pontiac fever) or can produce a severe pneumonia.

Intriguing is the comment in the media report in section [4] above: "That takes the total number of suspected cases reported in the city to 17. But, of 8 other cases reported by Saturday [4 Jan 2020] evening, none of the patients were found to have the unidentified strain." Has a new strain of virus, perhaps in the coronavirus family or other known respiratory virus families been identified?

We eagerly await continued results of the laboratory testing performed by the Wuhan Institute of Virology laboratory and possible other outside laboratories involved in this investigation.

A map of China showing locations of major cities in China can be found at <https://www.chinadiscovery.com/china-maps/city-maps.html>.

HealthMap/ProMED-mail map of Hubei Province, China: <http://healthmap.org/promed/p/340>. - Mod.MPP]

See Also

Undiagnosed pneumonia - China (HU) (02): updates, other country responses, RFI 20200103.6869668

Undiagnosed pneumonia - China (HU) (01): wildlife sales, market closed, RFI 20200102.6866757
2019

Undiagnosed pneumonia - China (HU): RFI 20191230.6864153

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