



Coronavirus: first Australian case confirmed in Victoria as 12 others tested

Victorian health minister says Chinese national in Melbourne is first confirmed case in Australia

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A man in his 50s in Melbourne has become the first confirmed case of novel coronavirus in Australia.

Victoria's health minister, Jenny Mikakos, said the man, a Chinese national, arrived in Melbourne at 9am on Sunday 19 January on China Southern Airlines Flight No CZ321 from Guangzhou.

The man tested positive early on Saturday morning. He had visited a GP on Thursday and went to the Monash medical centre at Clayton on Friday, where he was put into isolation.

The man showed no symptoms on the flight, "so may not have been contagious" at the time, Mikakos said. But "out of an abundance of caution" health officials were contacting everybody who was on the plane.

Eleven countries have now confirmed cases of novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV): 41 people have died, and more than 1,000 have been infected.

“There is no reason for alarm in the general community,” Mikakos said. “We have strict protocols that are in place in terms of how we deal with these infectious disease outbreaks.”

Mikakos said the infected man and his family “did everything right”.

“He exhibited no symptoms on the flight and when he did experience some symptoms of illness they contacted the GP on Thursday, they called ahead and he was double-masked when he presented to the GP clinic.

“He was not confirmed to have coronavirus by the GP. The family contacted the Monash medical centre on Friday, they called ahead of time and again he was masked before he turned up at [emergency] and immediately put into isolation.”

Australia’s chief medical officer, Prof Brendan Murphy, said there were about 12 people across Australia currently being tested for the virus. Five of those are being tested in NSW and two in Queensland.

Murphy said the man confirmed as having coronavirus had visited Wuhan province but had come to Australia on a direct flight from Guangzhou to Melbourne.

He said “there are potentially others like this person ... who was well when he travelled”, but that there was “no evidence this virus is being transmitted in Australia”.

“At this stage there is no risk to the general Australian community,” Murphy said.

But he said there was significant potential for more cases in Australia.

“There are other cases being tested each day. I wouldn’t be surprised if we have further confirmed cases.”

Murphy said that anyone who had travelled from China who developed flu-like symptoms should see their doctor.

The Australian foreign affairs minister, Marise Payne, announced the Australian government had raised its travel advice for Hubei province in central China to level four - the highest level.

“We now advise you: do not travel to and from Hubei province”, the government advised.

Payne said: “Chinese authorities have restricted travel in at least five Hubei cities. Australians going there may not be able to leave until restrictions are lifted.”

The prime minister Scott Morrison said a confirmed case of coronavirus had been anticipated by the Australian government and the issue was being addressed “incredibly seriously”.

“I want to assure Australians that our officials, our medical experts, our clinicians, our border security officials and agencies, our biosecurity professionals are all working closely together at both a commonwealth and state level.”

Globally, the coronavirus outbreak, which began in Wuhan city in China's central Hubei province, has killed 41 people and afflicted more than 1,000.

Efforts to contain the deadly new coronavirus have been stepped up, and the first cases have been reported in Europe.

China has widened restrictions on movement, expanding its unprecedented lockdown during the country's new year holiday period to 13 cities, covering at least 36 million people.

Late on Friday, authorities confirmed a further 15 deaths and 180 new cases of coronavirus, bringing the total number of fatalities to 41 people and more than 1,000 people affected.

Cases have been reported in South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, the United States, Thailand and Vietnam. On Friday, the first cases were reported in Europe with France saying it had identified three cases.

The World Health Organisation has stopped short of declaring the outbreak a public health emergency of global concern but called on the international community to work co-operatively to fight the spread of the virus.

There is an emerging suspicion in China that officials may be downplaying the number of cases recorded over recent weeks, recalling the government's reluctance to disclose the full scale of the 2002-03 Sars outbreak, which killed almost 800 people.

Videos circulating on Weibo and other social media, reportedly from Hubei hospitals, show crowded waiting rooms and distressed and overwhelmed medical staff. Patients have reported being turned away from hospitals, which have been inundated with people who fear they have the virus.

Health facilities in Wuhan are reportedly running out of beds and diagnostic kits for patients who present with fever-like symptoms, which could mean many are unsure if they have the virus.

Initial symptoms of coronavirus are similar to those of a cold and flu, and include a cough or fever.

Most of the people who have died in the outbreak have been older men but on Friday Chinese authorities confirmed a 36-year-old man had died, the youngest fatality so far.

Topics

- Coronavirus outbreak
- New South Wales
- Victoria
- Melbourne
- China
- Marise Payne
- news