

Govt confirms Thai coronavirus case

Patient fell ill after Wuhan trip last year

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A 73-year-old woman being treated at a hospital in Nakhon Pathom is the first Thai citizen to test positive for the new strain of coronavirus which has claimed nine lives across Asia to date, the Public Health Ministry said yesterday.

The patient fell ill shortly after returning from Wuhan in China -- considered the epicentre of the outbreak -- late last year.

Health authorities then tested her blood samples and her results came back positive for the new strain of coronavirus, bringing the total number of confirmed cases in Thailand to four.

The first case -- a 61-year-old female tourist from China -- was confirmed on Jan 13. On Jan 17, a 74-year-old Chinese woman also tested positive for the virus. Yesterday, test results for a 68-year-old Chinese man who displayed symptoms also came back positive.

The ministry said that all four had either visited and/or lived in Wuhan recently.

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The first two patients have already been discharged from hospital and returned to China, but the 68-year-old patient is still being treated at Bamrasnaradura Infectious Diseases Institute in Nonthaburi, said Dr Sophon Iamsirithavorn, the director of the Department of Disease Control.

under quarantine after the tourist showed symptoms of coronavirus infection, said Dr Thanit Sermkaew, an official with the provincial health department.

Dr Thanit said the result of the tourist's blood test will be released today.

Public Health Minister, Anutin Charnvirakul, yesterday assured the public that the ministry's precautionary measures are enough to help prevent a coronavirus outbreak in Thailand.

"All guidelines on the screening, detection, quarantine and treatment of suspected carriers are followed rigorously," Mr Anutin said, before adding the ministry will set up coronavirus coordination units at hospitals nationwide to help monitor and prevent the further spread of the virus.

Since Jan 3, some 19,480 crew members and passengers arriving on 123 flights which connect Thailand with Wuhan have been asked to go through thermal scanners at their respective points of entry. So far, 38 patients have been flagged by the scanners -- of which, 10 have been sent to hospitals for tests and treatment.

Mr Anutin warned that an entry ban on passengers who display pneumonia-like symptoms may be implemented, if the World Health Organisation declares the outbreak an international health emergency.

On Monday, China's public health authority confirmed that the virus can spread from human to human, sparking fears of a pandemic.

There are 440 confirmed patients with nine deaths in China, where the outbreak began. Health officials have also confirmed cases in Thailand, South Korea, Japan and Taiwan.

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