

PRESS RELEASE

On 31st December 2019, Chinese health authorities have alerted the World Health Organization about several cases of pneumonia in Wuhan City of Hubei Province due to a virus previously unknown. One week later, on 7th January 2020, it was confirmed that the causative organism for the illness is a coronavirus and this was named as “2019-nCoV” (novel coronavirus). Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses transmitted between animals and people. They can cause illness ranging from common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

An increased number of cases infected with 2019-nCoV are reporting from the Hubei Province, number of other provinces and cities in China and also several other countries. As of 25th January 2020, the World Health Organization has reported 1,370 confirmed novel coronavirus cases of which 1,297 cases are from China (Including Taipei, Macau and Hong Kong). Out of 23 cases reported from other countries 21 had a travel history to Wuhan City. Forty-one deaths have been reported, all of them are from China.

One Sri Lankan returned from Wuhan city was admitted to the National Institute of Infectious Diseases, Angoda on 24th January 2020 with symptoms and signs of respiratory illness. Another two Chinese nationals from Wuhan and visiting Sri Lanka were admitted on 25th January with similar illness. All three are females and were having very mild illness at the time of admission. Their state of health is improving. They are investigating for novel coronavirus and confirmatory test results will be available within next two days.

The 2019-nCoV can be transmitted from one individual to another. Since there is the possibility to introduce the disease in to Sri Lanka, similar to reporting of cases in countries other than China, necessary precautions have already been implemented at ports of entries. They are:

- Travelers arriving the country are advised on board to report to the health desk at the Bandaranaike International Airport if they are having symptoms suggestive of the disease (high fever, cough, cold and difficulty in breathing).
- The health desk at the airport is in operative round the clock
- Thermal scanners are installed in the airport to identify travelers having running temperature.
- If any person presents with signs and symptoms of suggestive of respiratory illness will be screened at the airport health desk to determine any possibility of novel coronavirus infection.
- If there is any such possibility, appropriate measures will be taken for admission and further investigation and treatment.

General public are advised to adhere to standard health measures needed for the prevention and control of respiratory infections. They are:

- Avoid crowded places.
- Frequently clean hands with soap and water or alcohol based hand rubs.

- When coughing and sneezing cover mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissues. Discard tissues safely and wash hands immediately after.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who is having fever and cough.
- If you have fever and cough, and had travelled to a city from where novel coronavirus cases are reported, seek prompt medical advice and share your travel history with the health care provider.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Sudath Samaraweera', written over a circular stamp or watermark.

Dr. Sudath Samaraweera

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