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Covid-19: WHO raises concerns about new cases in Beijing

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A surge in new cases of covid-19 in Beijing is a “concern” that is being closely monitored, the World Health Organization has warned.

More than 100 cases were recorded in the past few days, after almost two months without any new diagnoses in the city, heightening fears of a second wave of covid-19.

On 15 June Beijing officials reported 27 new cases of the virus, taking the total number to 106 since the latest outbreak began on 11 June.

Local health officials suspect the now closed Xinfadi food market in Beijing’s Fengtai district as being the source of the outbreak.

Parts of the city have been shut down, with tens of thousands of people now in lockdown in a bid to prevent the virus spreading further. In addition, schools have been closed, wedding banquets banned, and security checkpoints set up in neighbourhoods deemed medium risk areas.

People judged to be at high risk, such as close contacts of confirmed cases, are not allowed to leave the city, state media reported on 16 June. And outbound taxi services, as well as some bus routes between Beijing and nearby Hebei and Shandong provinces, have been suspended.

Speaking during a press conference at WHO’s headquarters in Geneva on 15 June, Michael Ryan, executive director of WHO health emergencies programme, said, “A cluster like this is a concern and it needs to be investigated and controlled and that’s exactly what the Chinese authorities are doing.”

He described the outbreak as “a significant event.”

A team of WHO epidemiologists based in its regional office in Beijing is working with Chinese health officials. “We have offered further assistance and further support as it is needed and we may be supplementing our country office team with more expertise in the coming days as the investigation develops,” Ryan said.

The global spread of the virus has accelerated in recent weeks, according to WHO director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

“It took more than two months for the first 100 000 cases to be reported. For the past two weeks, more than 100 000 new cases have been reported almost every single day,” he said.

“Even countries that have demonstrated the ability to suppress transmission must stay alert to the possibility of resurgence.”

He added, “Globally, more than 7.8 million cases of covid-19 have now been reported to WHO, and more than 430 000 deaths.

“Almost 75% of recent cases come from 10 countries, mostly in the Americas and South Asia. However, we also see increasing numbers of cases in Africa, eastern Europe, central Asia, and the Middle East.”

India’s health ministry reported 10 667 new cases on 15 June, bringing the country’s total to 343 091—the fourth highest in the world.

In Pakistan, lockdowns are being brought back in some areas amid concern that cases of the virus could soar in the coming weeks.

Indonesia’s ministry of health reported 1106 new cases and 33 deaths on 15 June, and the Philippines has reimposed a strict lockdown on the city of Cebu after a rise in cases.