

7 January 2020

National Advisory - Cluster of pneumonia of unknown cause in Wuhan, China

ADVISORY SUMMARY:

A cluster of pneumonia of unknown cause is being investigated in Wuhan, China, by the national health authorities in China. At this stage, there is no evidence of significant human-to-human transmission. Wuhan is currently in the winter season and respiratory diseases, including pneumonia, are common in this season.

The Ministry has been monitoring the situation and based on WHO advice, no specific measures for travellers are recommended at this stage.

As per the current health advice cards for people arriving in New Zealand, travellers who become sick within a month of their arrival are encouraged to seek medical advice and contact Healthline at 0800 611 116 or a doctor and share their travel history.

The current WHO recommendations on public health measures and surveillance of influenza and severe acute respiratory infections should be applied.

WHO advises people follow the basic principles to reduce the general risk of acute respiratory infections. These are:

- avoid close contact with people suffering acute respiratory infections
- frequently wash hands, especially after contact with ill people or their environment
- avoid close contact with sick live farm animals or wild animals
- people with symptoms of acute respiratory infection should practice cough etiquette (maintain distance, cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or clothing, and wash hands).

Background information:

As of 3 January 2020, a total of 44 patients with pneumonia of unknown cause have been reported to WHO by the national authorities in China. The cases are clustered in Wuhan. Of the 44 cases reported, 11 are severely ill, while the remaining 33 patients are in stable condition. According to the authorities, some cases were operating dealers or vendors in the Huanan Seafood market. The reported link to this wholesale fish and live animal market could indicate an exposure link to animals. The causal agent has not yet been identified.

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 so far.

According to media reports, the concerned market in Wuhan was closed on 1 January 2020 for environmental sanitation and disinfection.

Wuhan is currently in the winter season. The symptoms reported among the patients are common to several respiratory diseases, and pneumonia and other respiratory diseases are common in the winter season. However, the occurrence of 44 cases of pneumonia of unknown cause requiring hospitalization and clustered in space and time is not usual and is therefore under investigation.

WHO has requested further information from national authorities to assess the risk. New Zealand Ministry of Health has been monitoring the situation and we will update our advice as more information becomes available. For further information, please refer to <https://www.who.int/csr/don/05-january-2020-pneumonia-of-unknown-cause-china/en/>.