

U.S. confirms five cases of virus, China calls outbreak a grave situation



Washington, January 27 (RHC)-- The United States has five confirmed cases of the new virus from China, all among people who traveled to Wuhan at the center of the outbreak, health officials said Sunday.

Two new cases were reported in Los Angeles, California and the other in Maricopa County, Arizona. The three previously reported cases were a patient in Orange County, California; a man in his 30s in Washington state; and a woman in her 60s from Chicago.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Consulate in Wuhan at the epicenter announced it will evacuate its personnel and some private citizens aboard a charter flight, despite the city been on lockdown.

China's health minister said the country was entering a "crucial stage" as "it seems like the ability of the virus to spread is getting stronger." While Chinese President Xi Jinping has called the outbreak a grave situation and said the government was stepping up efforts to restrict travel and public gatherings while rushing medical staff and supplies to the city at the center of the crisis.

Among the measures to fight the spread of the new virus, the leading group of the Communist Party of China Central Committee announced the extension of the week-long Lunar New Year holiday to February 2nd, tougher restrictions on the flows of people across rural areas, cities and regions, and to speed up diagnosis and treatment, among other measures. Also, the sale of all wild animals has been banned, the Chinese government announced Sunday.

The cluster of the novel disease was initially reported on Dec. 31 has been linked to Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in Wuhan. Authorities linked wild animals sold at the market as the likely source of the virus.

The clinical signs and symptoms reported are mainly fever, with a few cases having difficulty in breathing, and chest radiographs showing invasive pneumonic infiltrates in both lungs. It has been identified as a coronavirus, which can cause illnesses ranging from common colds to the potentially deadly Sars that killed more than 700 people around the world in the 2002-03 outbreak.

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