

South Korea counts the cost of MERS outbreak

The South Korean Government looks to be close to making an official announcement that the spread of the MERS virus has been fully contained.



This follows the first uninterrupted period of nearly three weeks in the last two months, with no additional reported infections or deaths above the 36 tragic fatalities that have already been reported.

However, the Government is expected to delay any announcement until the full 28-day 'all clear' guideline from the World Health Organization (WHO) has passed.

In a sure sign that the situation appears to be improving strongly, the WHO said last week that 'due to the steep decline in case reporting, Disease Outbreak News concerning MERS-CoV in the Republic of Korea will no longer be published on a bi-weekly basis...' and only on an individual or additional basis if there are any more infections.

As reported, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) has had a very serious negative impact on South Korea's local economy, with inbound tourism – particularly Chinese group tours – down by as much as between 40-60% amongst leading visitor nationalities. Some estimates suggest the downturn could cost South Korea more than \$10bn in lost revenues.



Hong Kong International Airport wasted no time a month ago when it brought in MERS

South Korea counts the cost of MERS outbreak

temperature checks of its own to monitor all passengers from South Korea.

TOURISM AUTHORITY FIGHTS BACK

As reported, Lotte, Shilla and several other duty free and domestic downtown retailers have reported declining customer and sales levels.

In response, the Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) has been working hard to reassure tour companies that it is safe to visit South Korea, with the launch of a new limited campaign in China and Vietnam to try and stimulate more travel.

Meanwhile, Korea's main airlines are now said to be considering offering full flight schedules again to China, Japan and other Southeast Asian countries, although it hasn't happened yet.

In the interim, the South Korean government, which was heavily criticised for being slow to react to managing the outbreak, has also poured in billions of dollars worth of assistance for local businesses. It is also promising a further stimulus to try to get the economy back on track.

More than 16,500 people were quarantined in South Korea following the MERS outbreak in mid May, although most have now been given the all clear.