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www.who.int1211 GENEVA 27 SWITZERLAND - TELEPHONE: (41) 22.791.21.11 - FAX: (41) 22.791.31.11 - E-MAIL: inf@who.int**Note for the press n° 26
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SARS CASE IN LABORATORY WORKER IN TAIWAN, CHINA

Geneva -- Public health experts in Taipei have reported to the World Health Organization that a 44-year-old male laboratory worker has been infected with SARS. Multiple clinical samples have tested positive for SARS coronavirus in two laboratories in Taiwan, China. Further testing in a WHO SARS international reference and verification laboratory has been recommended as a means of confirming the results.

Local health specialists in Taipei have discussed the investigation and the response to the case with WHO today. All contacts are being identified and followed; any who become feverish will be isolated immediately.

At the moment, this appears to be an isolated incident.

This incident illustrates that SARS presents a continuing threat. In the post-epidemic period the greatest risk from SARS may be through exposure in laboratories where the virus is used or stored. For this reason, WHO urges countries to conduct an inventory of laboratories and samples that they hold, and to ensure that the correct biosafety procedures are being followed, as approved at a WHO laboratory workshop on 22 October 2003 (<http://www.who.int/csr/sars/guidelines/en/SARSLabmeeting.pdf>)

Details of this latest event are still under investigation. The local health experts have reported to WHO that the researcher was probably exposed to the virus in the laboratory on 5 December. The scientist then travelled to Singapore to attend a conference 7 to 10 December, returning about noon on 10 December. He began to feel unwell late on 10 December and placed himself in home quarantine. On 16 December, he called an ambulance and was admitted to hospital with a fever.

It has been announced that contacts are being identified and followed-up. Additionally, passengers on the researcher's return flight from Singapore are being notified and instructed to monitor their health. Authorities are also investigating how the patient was exposed.

Measures are also being taken to ensure that adequate biosafety procedures are in place in all laboratories working on SARS.

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