[“Good Friends” aims to help the North Korean people from a humanistic point of view and publishes “North Korea Today” describing the way the North Korean people live as accurately as possible. We at Good Friends also hope to be a bridge between the North Korean people and the world.]

[Hot Topics No. 311–1]

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Concerted Efforts Needed to Stop the Spread of New Flu in North Korea

[Hot Topics No. 311–1]

News Flash
H1N1 Influenza Spreads in North Korea

*Sinuiju.* Lack of Medical Equipment difficult to prevent Spread of H1N1 Influenza
H1N1 Influenza is spreading from early November in *Sinuiju*, North *Pyongan* province.
There have been some patients with symptoms of fever like common cold; however, it is difficult to get diagnosed even in the hospitals. The Provincial Sanitation and Quarantine Unit of North *Pyongan* province called the influenza as the ‘Swine Virus’, but after a few
deaths of children infected from the influenza, it later identified as the ‘epidemic as the likes of the bird flu’. However, the causes are yet to be known. The spread of the influenza is said to be quite fast, as there were 6 people infected within 3days since the first infection from the influenza in early November. Around 40 patients of adolescents and children have died suffering from high fever.

The Provincial Sanitation and Quarantine Unit and the Provincial Public Health Unit medical officials held an urgent meeting to plan for a contingency on the matter. Then, all the patients suffering from the influenza were sent to a rural hospital to be treated in isolation.

Presently, the medical officials from the Provincial Sanitation and Quarantine Unit were isolating households in the neighborhood where the patients were found and closely monitoring 3times a day. Unfortunately there is no measure to prevent the spread of the H1N1 influenza since there are high deficiency of equipments and techniques. They are saying that once infected, ‘it is fatal and death is certain’, and to isolate anyone who had close contact with the identified patients, and will be closely monitored in isolation for 25 to 30days for any symptoms may arise.

Hush, on the spread of the H1N1 Influenza,

“It May Hinder the process of being a Strong and Prosperous Nation
Party officials are showing grave concerns on the spread of the influenza that it, ‘hinders the way of being a Strong and Prosperous Nation 강성대국 and it affects the face and authority of the nation, thus, complete isolation of those infected is crucial. Particularly emphasizing that “ it would be a great shame if the international community to find out young people from North Korea were dying without getting a proper care at a stage where we are viciously building to be a Strong and Prosperous Nation’.

Command to take Tight Quarantine between Sinuiju – Dandong
The city of Sineuju, North Pyongan Province determined that the most recent H1N1 influenza is the epidemic virus from the city of Dandong and other border area with China. The government security will take more firm control on the immigration and enhance quarantine on the travelers crossing the border. Public health authority is calling on the meetings for contingency with the officials in related fields after reviewing the cases from Sinuiju.

Pyongyang, 7 Young people Died within 20days
The H1N1 influenza is shown to have spreading fast among children and young people. According to report of an official from the Ministry of Education of the City of Pyongyang, there were 7 young people died within 20days just in November. Theses include 2 university students 21 years of age, a 23 year-old university student, 2 soldiers of the 8.28 Youth Assault Section.
This has only been reported to the Public Health authority from the internal investigation since this cannot be known publicly not only in Pyongyang, but in other major cities. Two persons have died in the city of Pyongsung, a person dying in the early November and another died 26 days later. At the moment there are 6 patients in isolation, but these are not diagnosed as the H1N1 influenza infected with certainty. In Jogunsil Teacher’s College 조군실 사범대학, Wonsan, Kangwon Province, 2 freshmen female students have contracted the H1N1 influenza. The University authority has assembled the students on both 24th and 25th of November for them to take full caution not to contract H1N1 influenza. A student in the Sariwon Medical School, North Hwanghae province, contracted the influenza after having been to his home at Sinuiju. At first it seemed like common cold, but the colleagues advised to take a closer check – and the result was that he had contracted H1N1influenza. The student was treated in isolation, but soon died after suffering for 15 days.

**Public Health Authority Strain to Make Contingency for Preventing Spreading H1N1 Influenza**

December 1, the Ministry of Public Health has called on a meeting to make contingency plan to prevent H1N1 influenza from spreading. In the meeting a few suggestions have put forward for preventative measures, such as, importing the vaccines, students whose health are in doubt and isolate in the individual homes. Also, traffic control on all vehicles and trains that are transporting to and from Sinuiju and local councils should educate public on about the influenza and its fatality to enhance policy on the prevention. Ultimately, however, it is up to individual household whom should observe the preventative measures.

**Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Education,**

**Called All Schools to have a Winter Break**

The Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Education held a meeting responding to the crisis. The Ministry of Public health signified that they would need to make a cautious approach since most of deaths were occurring from under 23 years of age.

The Ministry of Education decided to call on all schools nation-wide to have a winter break a month earlier. The winter holiday usually starts after the New Year’s celebration on January 1, and begins from the 3rd, but this year because of the influenza they have started holidays a month ahead of the usual period.

The Ministry of Education have sent official letters to all schools including universities, colleges, high schools and elementary schools that, ‘there will be school holidays from the December 4, due to epidemic of the new virus infections and that it is a special consideration from the General Kim Jongil. An official from the Ministry of Education said that, ‘there have been increases in the numbers of students who have contracted influenza including Pyongyang and other major cities. He also added that the Epidemic of the New Flu is expanding, thus, closing the school is the inevitable outcome.

**Teachers are Ordered to “Check on the health status of students during the break.”**
As an attempt to prevent the spread of the new flu the education department of city and county throughout the nation issued an order requesting the teachers to check on the health status of students during the break. This means teachers are asked to visit the homes of students in person, paying a visit to 35 homes if a teacher has 35 students to see if anyone is ill. Also, they ordered the teachers that “The best efforts should be made for prevention by following the Party’s health policy and establish meticulous safety measures.” They are stressing the importance of prevention because the treatment of infected patients is difficult. Currently, the number of fatality from the flu is increasing nationwide, but there are not enough wards for patients suspected of being infected as well as not enough medicine, making the authorities keep constant vigil.

[Editorial]

Concerted Efforts Needed to Stop the Spread of New Flu in North Korea

In the midst of nationwide chaos caused by currency revaluation, the number of patients infected by the new flu is increasing very rapidly in some areas. The outbreaks of infected cases or death are reported in Sinuiju followed by Pyongyang, Pyungsung, Wonsan, and Sariwon. Considering the current trend the possibility of the spread of the flu nationwide cannot be excluded. The North Korean government seems to be working hard by taking measures such as strengthening the custom inspection at Dandong-Sineuju, importing the vaccine, informing the residents about the risk factors of the flu and ordering early winter break for schools.

There are several reasons that require extra cautions for the new flu in North Korea. First, currently North Korean residents are at the state of chronic malnutrition due to a long-term food shortage. As such, the new flu can be extremely dangerous epidemic to North Koreans with their weakened immune system. The only way to lower the fatality rate and prevent the rapid spread of the flu is to provide people with sufficient nutrition.

Second, the public health condition for prevention is in a dire situation as well. Even the developed countries aren’t able to come up with measures that go beyond securing the vaccine other than emphasizing the importance of maintaining clean sanitary conditions and washing hands thoroughly. The North Korean people are exposed to constant threat of infection because of lack of sanitary items such as masks, hand sanitizers, as well as clean drinking water.

Third, there are problems with lack of medical equipments, technology, and medicine. Several other problems that hinder implementation of proper actions such as securing of vaccines, diagnostic equipments for early detection, quarantine and treatment of infected patients, and provision of basic medicine to residents.

As such, the North Korean government must seek assistance from the international community instead of hiding the outbreaks of the new flu. Above all, they should ask for help from the World Health Organization (WHO) for epidemiological investigation and
receive the vaccines as soon as possible. They should also ask for help with necessary medical equipments from South Korea and the international community.

South Korea must also respond swiftly to the request of North Korea. The flu already claimed the lives of 117 people in South Korea alone, but the epidemic is still going strong, keeping the public health authorities on constant alert. Since the danger of the new flu is much bigger in North Korea they should monitor the situation very closely and actively engage in the provision of medicine and equipments.

Politically motivated interpretations of the outbreak of the new flu as a stumbling block for construction of a strong and prosperous nation or viewing North Korea’s request of medical equipment as an outcome of strong diplomatic pressure placed against North Korea are meaningless. Despite the dialog between the South and North Korean authorities in a deadlock, resolving of imminent humanitarian crisis must be dealt with as the top priority.

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Good Friends-- An International NGO for Peace, Human Rights and Refugees

Good Friends provides relief works for international refugees to become all lives’ friends, peace movement to fundamentally resolve disputes and conflicts that human beings face, and human rights movement to protect human rights.

Good Friends has been providing information on food shortages in North Korea, raising funds for humanitarian assistance, dispatching activists to national border areas between China and DPRK and having them investigate local situations, and publishing reports on food shortages in North Korea.

Currently, Good Friends is making efforts to improve humanitarian and human rights situation of North Korean people and to inform this situation to the international community by:
1) Collecting information on food shortages, public health conditions, education, the basic necessities situations and inform humanitarian organizations so that they can support North Korean people effectively.

2) Reporting the current human rights situation in North Korea where rights duly protected by law are being violated; assessing incidents of human rights violations in the process of arrest, punishment, and imprisonment and informing international communities; and requesting that the North Korean Government act to improve human rights.

3) Investigating the current situations of North Korean refugees in China, and providing protections and aid for them and their children in particular.

For these purposes, Good Friends USA publishes the weekly newsletter North Korea Today (English edition) to inform the international public.

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