

Second U.S. patient with new coronavirus confirmed

Chicago woman returned from China this month

By LAURAN NEERGAARD
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A Chicago woman has become the second U.S. patient diagnosed with the dangerous new virus from China, health officials announced Friday.

The woman in her 60s returned from China on Jan. 13 without showing any signs of illness, but three or four days later she called her doctor to report feeling sick.

The patient is doing well and remains hospitalized “primarily for infection control,” said Dr. Allison Arwady, Chicago’s public health commissioner.

Earlier this week, a man in Washington state became the first U.S. patient, also diagnosed after returning from a trip to the outbreak’s epicenter in central China.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is expecting more Americans to be diagnosed with the newly discovered virus in coming days, as worldwide the number of confirmed cases has passed 800.

The virus can cause fever, coughing, wheezing and pneumonia. It is a member of the coronavirus family that’s a close cousin to the deadly SARS and MERS viruses that have caused outbreaks in the past.

Still, “CDC believes that the immediate risk to the American public continues to be low at this time, but the situation continues to evolve rapidly,” said CDC’s Dr. Nancy Messonnier.

And those first two patients did the right thing, recognizing their travel risk and alerting doctors to it, so that health authorities could get them isolated to prevent spread, tested



AP Photo/Chinatopix

Heavy equipment works at a construction site for a field hospital in Wuhan in central China’s Hubei Province on Friday. China is swiftly building a 1,000-bed hospital dedicated to patients infected with a new virus that has killed 26 people, sickened hundreds and prompted unprecedented lockdowns of cities during the country’s most important holiday.

promptly, and start monitoring people who’ve had close contact with them.

The incubation period is thought to be two weeks. But it’s also a heavy flu season, and some of the symptoms are similar, Messonnier said.

“We want everyone to err on the side of caution if they have those symptoms and have a travel history,” she stressed.

Illinois health officials did not identify the hospital where the woman is in isolation.

The Washington state patient was in satisfactory condition Friday in an isolation unit at Providence Regional Medical Center in Everett, 30 miles north of Seattle. Nurses who’ve trained for Ebola patients are providing his care, wearing hoods with plastic face shields and using respirators to breathe filtered air. They are bagging and storing disposable gloves, linens and gowns until the CDC tells them what to do with the patient’s medical waste.

“We have been preparing for this since 2015,” said Robin Addison, one of the nurses and co-leader of the hospital’s biocontainment team. The hospital is one of about 150 nationwide ready to

assess patients with Ebola or other highly contagious diseases, with training money provided by Congress.

Nationally, over 2,000 returning travelers had been screened at U.S. airports and 63 patients in 22 states were being tested, although 11 of them so far have been found free of the virus, the CDC said.

China has issued massive travel bans in hard-hit sections of that country to try to stem spread of the virus. For now, CDC said it will keep up its screening process at five U.S. airports but will reevaluate its necessity.

“Right now, our response is very much a work in progress,” said Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., as lawmakers emerged from a briefing with federal health authorities. “There’s a lot we’re still learning.”

In Chicago, the health commissioner said the newest patient hadn’t had close contact with many people since becoming ill or taken public transportation or attended large gatherings.

“This is all very reassuring as far as infection risk to the general public,” Arwady said.

U.S. imposes new visa rules for pregnant women on ‘birth tourism’

Traveling to the U.S. to give birth is essentially legal

By MATTHEW LEE AND COLLEEN LONG
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration on Thursday published new visa rules aimed at restricting “birth tourism,” in which women travel to the U.S. to give birth so their children can have a coveted U.S. passport.

Applicants will be denied tourist visas if they are determined by consular officers to be coming to the U.S. primarily to give birth, according to the rules in the Federal Register. It is a bigger hurdle to overcome, proving they are traveling to the U.S. because they have a medical need and not just because they want to give birth here. Those with medical needs will be treated like other foreigners coming to the U.S. for medical treatment and must prove they have the money to pay for it — including transportation and living expenses.

The practice of traveling to the U.S. to give birth is fundamentally legal, although there are scattered cases of authorities arresting operators of birth tourism agencies for visa fraud or tax evasion. And women are often honest about their intentions when applying for visas and even show signed contracts with doctors and hospitals.

The State Department “does not believe that visiting the United States for the primary purpose of obtaining U.S. citizenship for a child, by giving birth in the United States — an activity commonly referred to as ‘birth tourism’ — is a legitimate activity for pleasure



AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster, File

A flag is waved outside the White House in Washington. The Trump administration is coming out with new visa restrictions aimed at restricting a practice known as “birth tourism.” That refers to cases when women travel to the United States to give birth so their children can have U.S. citizenship.

or of a recreational nature,” according to the new rules, which took effect Friday.

President Donald Trump’s administration has been restricting all forms of immigration, but Trump has been particularly plagued by the issue of birthright citizenship — anyone born in the U.S. is considered a citizen, under the Constitution. The Republican president has railed against the practice and threatened to end it, but scholars and members of his administration have said it’s not so easy to do.

Regulating tourist visas for pregnant women is one way to get at the issue, but it raises questions about how officers would determine whether a woman is pregnant to begin with and whether a woman could get turned away by border officers who suspect she may be just by looking at her.

Consular officers don’t have the right to ask during visa interviews whether a woman is pregnant or intends to become so. But they would still have to determine whether a visa applicant would be coming to the U.S. primarily to give birth.

Birth tourism is a lucrative business in both the U.S. and abroad. Companies take out advertisements and charge up to \$80,000 to facilitate the practice, offering hotel rooms and medical care. Many of the women travel from Russia and China to give birth in the U.S.

The U.S. has been cracking down on the practice since before Trump took office.

“An entire ‘birth tourism’ industry has evolved to assist pregnant women from other countries to come to the United States to obtain U.S. citizenship for their children by giving birth in the United States, and thereby entitle their children to the benefits of U.S. citizenship,” according to the State Department rules.

There are no figures on how many foreign women travel to the U.S. specifically to give birth. The Center for Immigration Studies, a group that advocates for stricter immigration laws, estimated that in 2012 about 36,000 foreign-born women gave birth in the U.S., and then left the country.

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