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New York City Investigating Three Possible Cases of Coronavirus
By: Melanie Grayce West

New York City officials are awaiting test results on three suspected cases of coronavirus and preparing for the possibility of quarantining visitors traveling from China and arriving at John F. Kennedy International Airport.

Health officials said Saturday they were investigating the first possible case of the deadly virus in the city. The case involved a visitor to the city who had recently been in China. The individual, who wasn’t named and is under 40 years old, is in stable condition at Bellevue hospital in Manhattan, part of the city’s public New York City Health + Hospital system, the officials said.

On Sunday night, health officials said they were investigating whether two additional people who had recently been in China have the coronavirus after showing symptoms. The second and third individuals, who also weren’t named, are both over 60 years old. One has been hospitalized at Flushing Hospital Medical Center, and the other is at New York-Presbyterian Queens. Both are in stable condition.

All three individuals tested negative for other common viruses, the city’s health department said. Results of their coronavirus tests should be known early this week.

Meanwhile, officials for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey on Sunday night began implementing new guidelines, announced last week, for nonstop flights coming from mainland China. JFK is one of seven airports in the U.S. where those flights from China are permitted to land.

Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar on Friday declared a public health emergency, saying that any foreign citizens who have traveled anywhere in China within the past 14 days would be denied entry to the U.S. Americans who had visited China’s Hubei province, the epicenter of the outbreak, will be quarantined for up to two weeks, he said.

Port Authority Executive Director Rick Cotton said during a news conference Sunday afternoon that the agency is working with federal, state and local officials to screen passengers.

U.S. citizens who have been to Hubei and are symptomatic, Mr. Cotton said, will immediately be taken to Bellevue or Jamaica Hospital Medical Center in Queens. People who traveled to Hubei and lack
symptoms will be transported to a quarantine facility, said Mr. Cotton, who didn’t identify where it would be.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo urged New Yorkers not to panic.

“Whatever happens internationally winds up at our doorstep relatively quickly,” Mr. Cuomo said Sunday. “We’ve been through situations like this before.”

New York City officials have offered scant details about the first person being tested for the coronavirus. The person arrived at Bellevue very late on Friday night and had been in the U.S. for two days before developing symptoms, said Oxiris Barbot, the city’s health commissioner, during a press conference Saturday night. The patient had a fever, cough and runny nose and sought out medical care, she said. The person wasn’t staying in a place with family or friends and has no family here, she said.

A spokeswoman for Mayor Bill de Blasio said that the person had been staying in a hotel. “This individual did what we have been asking New Yorkers to do,” said Dr. Barbot. “If you have traveled to affected areas in China within the last 14 days and you have symptoms—fever, cough, shortness of breath or you’re feeling unwell—contact your doctor or seek care in an emergency department.”

There are eight confirmed cases of the coronavirus in the U.S., health officials have said. Eleven other suspected cases in New York state all tested negative, said state Health Commissioner Howard A. Zucker. This novel strain of the coronavirus originated in the city of Wuhan, China.

If the patients under investigation ultimately test positive for the coronavirus, said Dr. Barbot, then the city’s disease detectives will begin retracing the person’s steps.

As part of that process, said Dr. Barbot, a person is asked in excruciating detail to account for their time in 15-minute intervals. The patient is asked about who they contacted, if it was casual or intimate, if they shared eating utensils or kissed, she said.

“We get into the very nitty-gritty of how it is that someone might come in contact with someone,” Dr. Barbot said.