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Briefing with Deputy Prime Minister Tatyana Golikova and Head of the Federal Service for Supervision of Consumer Protection and Welfare Anna Popova following the meeting of the emergency response centre to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus in Russia

31 January 2020 | 17:00 | Government House, Moscow

Excerpts from the transcript:

Tatyana Golikova: The meeting of the emergency response centre is over. Before speaking about the additional measures we have taken, I would like to inform you that the Federal Service for Supervision of Consumer Protection and Welfare (Rospotrebnadzor) have confirmed two cases of the new coronavirus, in the Trans-Baikal Territory and the Tyumen Region. They have been isolated and are being provided with all the necessary medical assistance that they may require. Both patients are citizens of China.

Now regarding the measures being taken by the emergency response centre. First, I would like to say that since midnight we have closed both pedestrian and vehicle border checkpoints. Today, based on the information provided by our colleagues from the border control and the Federal Customs Service, we have made an additional decision that citizens willing to cross the Russian border through these checkpoints, Chinese citizens with residence permits as well as citizens of the Republic of Belarus who want to cross the Russian border there will be allowed through but then placed under quarantine. Yesterday we established full cooperation with the governors regarding the organisation of quarantine facilities.

In addition to this, based on the information provided by our border service, we will limit the crossing of Chinese nationals from Mongolia into Russia.

Having analysed the information from the Foreign Ministry, we have decided today to start the evacuation of Russian citizens from Wuhan and the Hubei Province. We will know exactly how many Russian citizens are residing there by the end of the day. According to tentative data, there are 300 Russians in Wuhan and 341 in Hubei. The Foreign Ministry will check up on this data today and contact our citizens there, since the ministry has the necessary channels for this, to ask them if they want to come back to Russia. Having assessed the number of those who are choosing to come back, we will appoint the planes that will fly to Wuhan to bring our citizens back to Russia, where they will be kept in quarantine for 14 days.

Everyone will be informed about quarantine requirements, and they will have an opportunity to decide whether they want to stay in China or fly to Russia. Specialists from Rospotrebnadzor will accompany all the flights in order to keep the situation under control.

Now as regards organised tours. According to the Federal Agency for Tourism, there are 2,665 Russians staying in Hainan province right now. All of them must be sent back to Russia by 4 February. They will fly back on charter flights and they won't be quarantined. Only those with the symptoms or a high temperature will be quarantined.

In addition to these measures, we will draft a Government Resolution on a temporary ban on working visas for Chinese citizens.

Regarding air travel, the emergency response centre has reached decision. To date there are 37 scheduled Chinese flights and 154 Russian flights. We will suspend all flights except Aeroflot, which will fly to four Chinese cities regularly: Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Hong Kong.

Per agreement with China, four Chinese airlines' flights to Moscow will remain in operation. They will land at Sheremetyevo Terminal F, where the procedure will be organised by the aviation authorities and Rospotrebnadzor specialists who will receive passengers and decide on how to proceed, whether they will be sent to medical institutions if necessary or sent home.

Now regarding flights to other Russian cities. As I said, we are suspending them but will request the Chinese side (the Russian Foreign Ministry has been instructed accordingly) to continue the former regular flights – the scheduled times of the former regular flights as charter flights – so we can have the opportunity to fly Russians from China if they want. Let me stress: if they want to. At the same time, we will suggest that China can use these flights to return Chinese people home when they fly to China from other cities, apart from Moscow, if necessary. We will receive an update from China on this issue in the next several days. This flight schedule plan will be introduced at midnight on 1 February.

We are also working with China on whether Rospotrebnadzor and Health Ministry specialists can be sent to China to provide any assistance to the Chinese.

The emergency response centre has decided, and will inform the Prime Minister once he returns from his business trip, that it is necessary to provide humanitarian assistance to the People's Republic of China. Protective masks are the quickest thing we can provide. The Ministry of Industry and Trade is working to estimate the volume of the possible immediate supply of this item. The Emergency Ministry is prepared to fly to any city the Chinese authorities name within six hours.

We know that pharmacies are now buying up personal protective items and that some pharmaceutical chains are overpricing preventive medications. This is why we are asking the pharmaceutical chains and producers to not abuse the current situation. We are informing them that the emergency response centre has instructed the Federal Antimonopoly Service and the Federal Service for Supervision of Healthcare to cut short attempts at overpricing and unfair business practices.

I would like to add that today, based on the results of our measures, the emergency response centre has approved a national plan to contain and prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus on Russian territory. The Prime Minister will endorse this plan upon his return from his business trip.

Anna Popova: I would like to note that during the monitoring – since the beginning of the year – we have checked 236 people for the coronavirus. These are people who were stopped at the border because they had URTI symptoms (high temperature or other symptoms) or those who successfully crossed the border and sought medical attention upon their return from China at least two weeks ago. This close monitoring allowed us to identify two affected Chinese citizens. One of them spent almost a month in China. He went there on December 28 and came back on January 26. The other man spent about the same amount of time in China and returned on January 28. Both were in satisfactory condition. The treatment for the disease was easy enough. Both were taken to isolation wards. They received timely treatment and all of their contacts were identified and taken to the hospital whenever necessary. As of today, there is no risk of the coronavirus spreading. We are monitoring the situation, but I would like to repeat that in both cases the course of the disease was mild. They had URTI symptoms and a slightly higher temperature. Today, their condition is stable. They have no symptoms and their temperature is normal.

We continue monitoring with a domestic test system and check all tourists returning to the Russian Federation either onboard an aircraft or in the airport terminal. We are monitoring the situation in every airport with these flights. We are doing this in addition to the mandatory double temperature measurement. People do understand the

need for these measures. Nobody has objected to them so far. We are checking large numbers of people. Today we checked tourists from five flights, primarily those from Hainan Island.

Question: There is no vaccine yet. The media are quoting different experts that say it will take several months or over a year to develop it. Do you know how much time it will take to develop a vaccine?

Tatyana Golikova: Our Chinese colleagues are working on a vaccine. We are also working on it. It's hard to say now how much time it will take to develop it. We are hoping that our Chinese colleagues, who agreed to receive the team of our specialists, will cooperate with us and that we will achieve a positive result. Our specialists are working on the vaccine regardless. We told you initially that we are open to any changes. We will keep you posted on any news in this regard.

Question: What can you tell us about a press report that the virus is spreading only among Chinese people? When will a decision on holding the Sochi forum be made?

Anna Popova: I'm sure that you are monitoring the situation and know that there are more than just Chinese people among the infected. People in European countries and in the United States have caught the virus as well. These are people of other ethnic origins and races. This should confirm that the new coronavirus is not selective. But to answer your question fully it is necessary to have the virus and work on it.

Tatyana Golikova: As for the Sochi forum, a decision on this will be made on Monday since it must be a Government decision.

Question: RIA Novosti. You said retail prices might go up. But are there enough medications in pharmacies?

Tatyana Golikova: We do not have any problems with personal protective equipment or medications. Everything is available. Don't worry. We should avoid buying large volumes. I asked the manufactures and pharmacies to not exploit the issue. The Health Ministry and Rospotrebnadzor endorsed and issued joint temporary recommendations on what to do and what medications to take. But as usual, all these unflattering things began to happen. There is no need for panic buying or excessive pricing. So I am asking our colleagues, manufacturers and pharmacies to avoid all this because inspections are inevitable.

As for temporary methodological recommendations, we are monitoring this and are staying in touch with our Chinese colleagues. If they receive new information on treatment methods, we will introduce the changes into these temporary recommendations. The same applies to medications.

Question: Do you plan to stop mail and freight traffic?

Tatyana Golikova: No, we do not.

Question: Maria Kiselyova, BBC Russian Service. I would like to ask you one more question about the Sochi forum. As far as I know, on Monday the Government will discuss this issue, including with the members of the emergency response centre. What is your position and what is the centre's position? Should this forum be held, cancelled or postponed?

Tatyana Golikova: The Government will decide this. As for the centre, we are monitoring the situation in the People's Republic of China. It is changing, although not much. In the past three days the number of infected people is tending to decrease. We will follow this situation closely and make a final decision on Monday.

Question: A number of universities have decided to extend vacations for students from China. Are there plans to raise this decision to the federal level?

Tatyana Golikova: This decision was made at the previous meeting of the emergency response centre. We instructed the Ministry of Science and Higher Education to extend the vacations for Chinese students who went home until March 1. There are about 24,000 of them at Russian universities.

Question: Two infected men were identified. Will the centre change anything in its procedures because of this, and do you plan to take any additional measures?

Tatyana Golikova: The procedure will not be changed. We have already taken the basic and even some additional measures. We will hold meetings depending on the situation.

Question: When will the evacuation take place?

Tatyana Golikova: The Foreign Ministry will decide today and report to us. We will fix the date after reading the report.

Question: Will you introduce forced hospitalisation?

Tatyana Golikova: Everyone returning from Wuhan and the Hubei Province will be taken to the hospital for quarantine without exception.

I would like to give the floor to Ms Popova as the Chief Sanitary Doctor. Colleagues, I have an important request for you. You regularly communicate with the public via the different sources available to you. So please report the information that Ms Popova will give you now.

Anna Popova: The main thing for all of us is to protect our health and the health of our families and friends. First, flu season is coming anyway. The preventive measures are very similar. Everyone must take simple protective measures. First, do not go to China now. For all the restrictions, goodwill is the strongest impetus.

Limit your participation at large public events because the approaching flu virus is very similar to the coronavirus. It will be more difficult for us to distinguish them. The main rules – wash your hands, keep your devices clean and don't touch your face with your hands. Take care of yourselves. The very first symptoms should compel you to visit a doctor.

You must also take care of your children and older people. This virus is very dangerous, especially for older people. None of us wants to be responsible for the ill health of our family members, but it will be our fault if we do not observe simple rules that are vital to our health. I wish you good health.

Person:

Tatyana Golikova.