Beat: News

WHO chief says novel coronavirus `poses a threat to the entire world`

-, 28.05.2013, 19:29 Time

USPA News - The World Health Organization (WHO) has voiced its concern about a new novel coronavirus that has killed more than 20 people since last year, warning that the virus `poses a threat to the entire world` and that urgent research is needed. WHO Director-General Margaret Chan made the alarming comments on late Monday during her closing remarks at the 66th World Health Assembly.

"Looking at the overall world health situation, my greatest concern right now is the novel coronavirus," she said. "We understand too little about this virus when viewed against the magnitude of its potential threat." The new coronavirus first emerged in the Middle East last year and is known to have infected at least 44 people, including 23 people who died of the illness. The disease appeared at a health care facility in Saudi Arabia`s eastern province of Ahsaa earlier this month and infected fifteen patients, more than a month after the last case of the virus had been reported. And earlier this month, France confirmed the country`s first case of the novel coronavirus in a patient who recently traveled to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, where another case had been reported in March. The French Ministry of Social Affairs and Health confirmed Tuesday that the victim had died, and a second person who shared a hospital room in Valenciennes with the first patient remains in a critical condition with the same illness. But experts are unsure how people become infected, whether it is from animals, from contaminated surfaces, or from other people. "Any new disease that is emerging faster than our understanding is never under control," Chan said. "We do not know where the virus hides in nature. We do not know how people are getting infected. Until we answer these question, we are empty-handed when it comes to prevention." While there is no evidence yet of continuous human-to-human transmission, the latest warning comes just weeks after Dr. Keiji Fukuda, WHO Assistant Director-General for Health Security and the Environment, said it appears likely that the virus is able to pass from person-to-person when there is close contact. "The novel coronavirus is not a problem that any single affected country can keep to itself or manage all by itself. The novel coronavirus is a threat to the entire world," Chan said on Monday. "Through WHO and the IHR, we need to bring together the assets of the entire world in order to adequately address this threat. We need more information, and we need it quickly, urgently." Also on Tuesday, the Coronavirus Study Group of the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses proposed to use the name Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) for the disease. The WHO said it generally prefers virus names which do not refer to specific regions or places, but said the new designation is acceptable as it was built on consultations with a large group of scientists.

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-1030/who-chief-says-novel-coronavirus-poses-a-threat-to-the-entire-world.html

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619