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Korea unveils proactive pandemic influenza preparedness and response plan

September 25, 2024 | News

Response strategies will be adapted based on an outbreak's phases



The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) has announced the 'Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and Response Plan' aimed at preparing for future pandemics.

This revised plan represents a comprehensive update after six years. It incorporates recommendations from the World Health Organization (WHO) regarding key priorities for national pandemic preparedness. The WHO has identified pandemic influenza as a significant candidate for the next pandemic, emphasising the urgent need for countries to enhance their preparedness.

The new plan aims to minimise not only health impacts but also social and economic consequences during a pandemic. It encompasses a robust surveillance system, resource mobilisation strategies, vaccination strategies, a One Health approach, and tailored response strategies to different pandemic phases, as outlined below.

First, to facilitate the early detection of emerging viruses, the number of surveillance institutions will be significantly increased from 300 to 1,000. Sophisticated predictive models employing genetic analysis and artificial intelligence (AI) will be developed.

Second, medical resources, including medical countermeasures, will be stockpiled to ensure readiness for the first six months following an outbreak. Additionally, infrastructure for genetic testing and rapid testing will be expanded, and the number of hospital beds for infectious diseases will increase from 1,100 to 3,500.

Third, predictive vaccines and prototypes will be developed to ensure availability within 100 or 200 days following an outbreak, while ongoing research and development (R&D) will focus on establishing mRNA vaccine platforms.

Fourth, the One Health approach will be strengthened. Animal influenza surveillance will be broadened to include various livestock species, and an early warning system will be established to facilitate preventive measures. This system will integrate and analyze data from human populations, animals, and their environments to detect risks at an early stage.