

KN95 masks from China unusable

Says Canada

AFP, Montreal

The Canadian government said Friday that one million KN95 masks imported from China did not meet its strict standards and so could not be distributed to frontline health workers amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The Public Health Agency of Canada "has identified approximately one million KN95 masks as non-compliant with specifications for healthcare settings," a spokesman said.

"These items were not distributed to provinces and territories for frontline health care response, and are being subsequently assessed for use in non-healthcare settings," he said.

Chinese model KN95 masks are similar to N95 masks, as well as the FFP2 model used in Europe.



People hold signs during a protest against the coronavirus shutdown in front of State Capitol in Madison, Wisconsin, on Friday. Gyms, hair salons and tattoo parlors had a green light to reopen in the US state of Georgia on Friday as the death toll from the coronavirus pandemic soared past 50,000 in the US. PHOTO: AFP

More than a lung disease

NY doctors try new ways as patients show new signs

AGENCIES

As the novel coronavirus spread through New York City in late March, doctors at Mount Sinai Hospital noticed something strange happening to patients' blood.

Signs of blood thickening and clotting were being detected in different organs by doctors from different specialties. This would turn out to be one of the alarming ways the virus ravages the body, as doctors there and elsewhere were starting to realise.

At Mount Sinai, nephrologists noticed kidney dialysis catheters getting plugged with clots. Pulmonologists monitoring COVID-19 patients on mechanical ventilators could see portions of lungs were oddly bloodless. Neurosurgeons confronted a surge in their usual caseload of strokes due to blood clots, the age of victims skewing younger, with at least half testing positive for the virus.

"It's very striking how much this disease causes clots to form," Dr J Mocco, a Mount Sinai neurosurgeon, said in an interview, describing how some doctors think COVID-19, the illness caused by the coronavirus, is more than a lung disease.

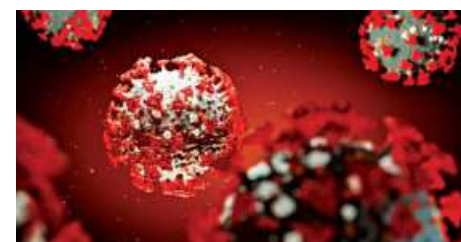
In some cases, Mocco said, a stroke was a young patient's first symptom of COVID-19.

As colleagues from various specialties pooled their observations, they developed a new treatment protocol. Patients now receive high doses of a blood-thinning drug even before any evidence of clotting appears.

"Maybe, just maybe, if you prevent the

clotting, you can make the disease less severe," said Dr David Reich, the hospital president. The new protocol will not be used on certain high-risk patients because blood thinners can lead to bleeding in the brain and other organs.

In the three weeks beginning mid-March, Mocco saw 32 stroke patients with large blood clots in the brain, double the usual number for that period.



Five were unusually young, under age 49, with no obvious risk factors for strokes, "which is crazy," he said. "Very, very atypical." The youngest was only 31.

At least half of the 32 patients would test positive for COVID-19, Mocco said.

As their wards began to overflow with COVID-19 patients, the Mount Sinai doctors read papers describing similar findings from doctors in China's Hubei province and other hard-hit areas, and discussed them with their peers in phone calls and webinars.

The American Society of Hematology, which has also noted the clotting, says in its guidance to physicians that the benefits of the blood-thinning therapy for COVID-19 patients not already showing signs of clotting are "currently unknown."

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC LATEST UPDATES

DEATH TOLL NEARS 200,000

The death toll from the novel coronavirus pandemic rose to 197,871 yesterday, according to a tally from Johns Hopkins University yesterday at 1200GMT. More than 2,826,904 declared cases have been registered in 193 countries and territories. In US, the death toll stood at 51,949. Italy is the next most-affected country with 25,969 deaths. It is followed by Spain with 22,524 fatalities, France with 22,279 deaths and Britain with 19,567 deaths.

51,000 DEATHS IN US

The death toll in the United States surpassed 51,000 amid more than 890,000 cases. But the number of daily deaths in New York has gone down, with 422 reported on Friday - the lowest since April 1. Meanwhile, China reported it has not had a new death from the virus in 10 days.

NO DEATHS IN CHINA FOR 10 DAYS

China has reported no new deaths from the coronavirus in the last ten days, as attention has turned to northern provinces bordering Russia. The vast majority of new cases in the country have been imported, according to health authorities.

43 PERCENT SURGE IN AFRICA

Africa's coronavirus cases have surged 43 percent in the past week but its countries are dangerously behind in the global race for scarce medical equipment. Ten nations have no ventilators at all. John Nkengasong, director of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the continent is competing with the developed world in terms of obtaining supplies and equipment. "The very future of the continent will depend on how this matter is handled."

BRITAIN STARTS PLASMA TRIAL

Britain is to start trials to see whether plasma collected from donors who have recovered from COVID-19 could be an effective treatment for patients who are severely unwell with the disease, Reuters news agency reported. Up to 5,000 severely ill patients with COVID-19 could soon be treated each week with plasma as part of a new approach to treating the virus, the health department said on Saturday.

NEW ANTI-MALARIA DRUG WARNING

The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) warned against taking anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine, touted by President Donald Trump as a possible treatment for COVID-19, outside of a hospital or formal study on Friday, citing "serious and potentially life-threatening heart rhythm problems". Trump has repeatedly stated that the drug is a possible treatment for COVID-19 and could be a "game-changer", seemingly based on anecdotal evidence.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

India, Pakistan ease curbs

Allow limited opening of small businesses amid lockdown

REUTERS, New Delhi/Islamabad

The Indian government allowed a limited reopening of shops in neighbourhoods and residential areas from Saturday, more than a month after the nation went into a lockdown to curb the spread of the coronavirus, officials said.

Late on Friday the federal home ministry said retail shops could start operations with the staff number reduced by 50%, while also requiring appropriate social distancing, wearing of masks and gloves during work.

The sale of liquor and other non-essential items will continue to be prohibited, and no shops in large market places, multi-brand and single-brand malls will be allowed to open for business till May 3.

India has reported 24,506 cases of the coronavirus and 775 deaths, with authorities setting up new teams to focus on compliance and implementation of lockdown measures.

In neighbouring Pakistan, the government extended the nationwide lockdown till May 9. However, it is switching to a so-called "smart lockdown" from Saturday for targeted tracking and tracing of cases while allowing some industrial and commercial activities to begin under safety guidelines.

"Isolating these cases and their contacts will improve our ability to contain the disease alongside allowing the economy to function and people to get employment," said Asad Umar,



Pakistan's planning minister, who also oversees the coronavirus national response body.

"This upcoming month of Ramadan will be decisive," he said, emphasising that adhering to the government's virus containment measures will enable the further re-starting of parts of the economy.

Prayer congregations for Ramadan have also been allowed in Pakistan with the exception of the southern province of Sindh, where doctors have warned the virus could spread rapidly.

In Karachi, the capital of Sindh and Pakistan's largest city, most mosques were closed to the public for the Ramadan evening prayer gatherings, which began on Friday.

As of Saturday, Pakistan reported 11,940 cases of infections, including 253 deaths.

S Arabia abolishes flogging

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia has abolished flogging as a punishment, the state human rights commission said yesterday, hailing a "major step forward" in the reform programme launched by the king and his powerful son.

Court-ordered floggings in Saudi Arabia -- sometimes extending to hundreds of lashes -- have long drawn condemnation from human rights groups. But they say the headline legal reforms overseen by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman have brought no let-up in the conservative Islamic kingdom's crushing of dissent, including through the use of the death penalty.

The state human rights commission said that the latest reform, which was reported by Saudi media including the pro-government Okaz newspaper, would ensure that no more convicts were sentenced to flogging.

"This decision guarantees that convicts who would previously have been sentenced to the lash will from now on receive fines or prison terms instead," its chairman, Awad al-Awad, said.

Previously, the courts had powers to order the flogging of convicts found guilty of offences ranging from extramarital sex and breach of the peace to murder.

In future, judges will have to choose between fines and/or jail sentences, or non-custodial alternatives like community service.

Despite the reform drives, the brutal murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October 2018 and the increased repression of dissidents at home have overshadowed the prince's pledge to modernise the economy and society.

Prize-winner of international competitions, Moldavian violinist Alexandra Conunova plays a concert from her balcony for her neighbours in Lausanne on Friday during the semi-lockdown due to the Covid-19 outbreak, caused by the novel coronavirus.



PHOTO: AFP

Pak doctors launch hunger strike over safety fears

AFP, Lahore

Dozens of Pakistani doctors and nurses have launched a hunger strike demanding adequate protective equipment for frontline staff treating coronavirus patients, the lead organiser of the protest said yesterday.

Health workers have complained for weeks that the country's hospitals are suffering chronic shortages of safety gear, prompting the arrest of more than 50 doctors who called for more supplies in the city of Quetta earlier this month.

The protesters have kept working in their hospitals while taking turns to demonstrate outside the health authority offices in provincial capital Lahore.

Frontline staff have been left vulnerable, with more than 150 medical workers testing positive for the virus nationwide, according to the Young Doctors' Association (YDA) in worst-hit Punjab province. Several doctors and nurses have died from COVID-19.

Does sunlight kill coronavirus?

AFP, Washington

Does sunlight rapidly destroy the coronavirus? A White House presentation on a mysterious government study says so -- but some scientists have called for caution as we await more evidence.

An official from the Department of Homeland Security made the eye-catching announcement during President Donald Trump's daily pandemic briefing Thursday, showing a dramatic reduction in the virus' viability under the sun's rays.

On a stainless steel surface in sunlight, the virus shrinks to half its amount in a matter of just two minutes in 70 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit (21 to 24 degrees Celsius) heat and 80 percent humidity, compared to six

hours in the dark, it said. When the virus was suspended in the air, its half-life in sunlight was just a minute and a half when the temperature was 70 to 75 degrees with 20 percent humidity, as opposed to one hour in the dark.

Beyond the headline results, there are so far few details, making it impossible for experts to independently validate the findings.

We do know that the solar radiation contained in ultraviolet light can be very effective at dealing with certain pathogens. It is entirely possible that the SARS-CoV-2 virus is more vulnerable to regular sunlight than its older cousin. But not all microbes respond in the same way. The lack of details only raises more questions than conclusions.

Advertisement for Serenity 3 Bedroom Apartments at Uttara Residential Area. Includes contact information for Asset Developments & Holdings Ltd and a table of apartment packages with prices and features.