

Combating COVID-19 requires Accurate Information and Right Practices

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The confirmed cases of COVID-19 around the world have exceeded 190,000 and the death toll reached over 7,800 (as of late March). Consequently, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the virus as a pandemic.

The Greek term “Pandemic” is a combination of “Pan” meaning *all* and “Demic” referring to *people*. Pandemic is the highest grade of warning against infectious diseases by the WHO.

This is the third time in the history that the organization declares a pandemic. As COVID-19 has expanded to every corner of the world, the WHO declared a “pandemic” during this outbreak.

In South Korea, the confirmed patients and the deaths are also reaching superior to 8,000 and 80, respectively. A major cause emerged from a group infection by a religious sect, resulting in significant community contagion. Moreover, about 80 workers - at a call center in Guro district, Seoul - were infected due to the working environment vulnerable to infection.

If you stay surrounded by many people at multi-purpose facilities or closed spaces, such as internet cafés, religious events or nursing homes, it is prone to be highly exposed to infectious conditions. Schools, which are also immensely vulnerable to group infection, will be open in April as a preventive measure.

The report by the UN Conference on Trade and Development forecasts that the global export will drop by 59 trillion won due to the pandemic. In terms of the export decline, Korea is ranked the fourth by four trillion won, following Europe and the United States. The novel coronavirus is substantially impacting not only Korean society and economy but also the whole world. Amid this outbreak, incorrect information is arising from anxiety and fear, causing secondary harmful effects. For instance, KCs masks (industrial) were used instead of KF masks (healthcare), and methanol was even misused.

As the virus expands, we may see some cases where people put on KCs masks rather than KF masks. The KCs masks are to block harmful substances like dust originating within worksites. In particular, if you wear the industrial masks with air valves attached, viruses may go through the valves as you exhale. We should use proper type of masks to prevent the infectious disease.

On March 7, a family living in Namyangju of Gyeonggi Province used methanol to disinfect the inside of the house. A woman and her two children suffered from stomachache, vomiting and visual disturbance because of acute poisoning, and were treated in an emergency room. In Iran, a wrong folk remedy has spreaded that methanol is effective against COVID-19. Unfortunately, this led to about 40 deaths. Being an industrial alcohol, methanol causes eye blindness and death in case of severe poisoning. Back in

2016, four workers had been constantly exposed to methanol steam and went blind. The incidents prove the lethal consequences brought by methanol. The damaged worker worked at a facility manufacturing parts of mobile phone in Bucheon.

Luckily, the confirmed cases for the past days have decreased to a two-digit number. The number of those who have been recovered is higher than the daily confirmed cases. Here also comes good news that developed countries appreciate South Korea's remarkable quarantine system as well as citizen's proactive commitments in preventing the virus and propagation.

The KOSHA is also actively taking parts in prevention and treatment against today's virus. In order to limit the proliferation of COVID-19, our institution has supplied 1.52 million masks to small construction sites with high vulnerability of infection prevention, manufacturing worksites with less than 50 employees as well as facilities with foreign workers. We also plan to provide up to 20 million won for call centers, which are susceptible to infectious diseases, to facilitate establishment of temporary partitions or purchase of air purifiers. Furthermore, Personal Protective Equipments and protective clothing for quarantine measures were also delivered to a special disaster area, Daegu.

The most fundamental in addressing risks is to take correct practices in company with accurate information. Without the vaccine developed, it is crucial to wear a proper type of masks, wash hands thoroughly and keep social distancing. It is the very time to take true citizenship, with which all take care of one another and participates in efforts to go back to our normal life as fast as possible. <END>