

TAJIKISTAN AND CORONAVIRUS

Until April 30, 2020, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population supported the official position on the absence of registered cases of COVID-19 infection in the republic.

The ministry's activities were coordinated with the Permanent Representative of the World Health Organization in Tajikistan on sanitary and epidemiological monitoring in the country.

The cause of many deaths from pneumonia in April 2020 was determined by abnormal weather in the country. According to the Ministry of Health, in the first quarter of this year, 5023 cases of pneumonia were recorded. However, on May 1, data appeared on the website of the National Bank of Tajikistan that over four months the situation had changed dramatically: 5489 people fell ill with pneumonia in the country, which 850 cases more than in January-April last year.

This assessment of pneumonia has caused concern and doubt in society.

The study of the problem revealed that the virus was brought to Tajikistan in February-March through airspace and 30 ground checkpoints. In mid-March, the first carriers of COVID-19 infection were already identified in neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The pilgrims of the small Hajj from Saudi Arabia brought the virus to Kyrgyzstan, and the virus was imported to Uzbekistan from France and Turkey on a flight from Istanbul on March 15. The citizens of Tajikistan arrived on the same flight and were later found and isolated. Theoretically, they could be virus carriers and before their isolation were in contact with others. The first report of deaths from pneumonia appeared on April 5 in a hospital in the Jabbor Rasulov district of the Sughd region. After this, reports of deaths from pneumonia became more frequent.

Doctors denied cases of COVID-19 infection, but the increase in deaths from pneumonia caused great doubt among the population. Tajik Ministry of Health did not change its position before the arrival of WHO mission: “We had suspicions that it was COVID-19, but there was no reliable evidence and confirmation from the laboratory”.

Finally, on April 30, Tajik authorities confirmed the detection of 15 cases of COVID-19, without specifying the source of infection and the first patient identified.

Practice has shown that openness and truth are one of the main conditions for the epidemic containing and preventing of the virus importation. Despite the official letter from WHO, in Tajikistan mass events have not been canceled. The information from the Ministry of Health about the negative results of 4100 tests before April 27 was not confirmed. The World Bank in early April allocated a grant of \$ 11.3 million to the Ministry of Finance for fighting with COVID-19 spread. But at the same time, the Tajik authorities prepared additional beds in hospitals, disinfected educational institutions, public places and streets, transferred textile enterprises to mass masks, widely informed the population about the virus.

The real situation has shown that the established healthcare system in the republic is not ready for transparent management and dialogue with society. The republican headquarters for fighting with COVID-19 spread does not have a press center, website, or telephone and does not provide media information in a timely manner. Only after April 30 were closed educational institutions, demanded self-isolation and compulsory social distance and mask regime.

The arrival of the WHO mission revealed serious shortcomings in the work of the Tajik Ministry of Health and a new minister was also appointed on its recommendation. From scratch, a real action plan for monitoring and preventing of COVID-19 virus, providing of the medical facilities with necessary medicines and equipment was approved. Assessment of the situation is currently radically changed for the better.

The competent authorities provide a real picture of new cases of virus infection and local measures to prevent and treat them. As of May 6, cases of virus infection were detected in all regions of the republic, including Badakhshan. The Republic of Tajikistan in the fighting against coronavirus relies on the experience of Central Asian countries and CIS. At the same time, the country does not have financial and economic opportunities to declare full quarantine. Therefore, the option of soft quarantine was chosen with the hope of population supporting to comply with the regime of self-isolation and personal hygiene.

There are 86 new COVID-19 cases in Tajikistan as of May 6, bringing the total number to 379. The number of those who could not recover has reached 8 people, reports the Tajik Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population. As of May 6, 3,596 people have been under medical supervision and 246 people have been discharged over the past 24 hours.

Faizullo Barotzoda