



ASEAN BIOLOGICAL THREATS SURVEILLANCE CENTRE

DISEASE ALERT



Korea Disease Control and
Prevention Agency



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ASIAN NATIONS

October 6, 2026 | Issue No. 19

First alert : October 6, 2026 | Suspected Pneumonic Plague in Russia

Sub-Locations Affected

Irkutskaya Oblast, Siberia

Event Description

On October 2, 2026, health authorities in the Russian Federation reported the death of a 28-year-old laboratory technician at the Irkutsk Anti-Plague Research Institute following suspected occupational exposure to pneumonic plague. The patient developed severe pneumonia and was hospitalized on September 30 before dying despite intensive medical care. On October 4, Investigators found no pathogens related to plague.



Figure 1. Map of affected area

Epidemiological Information

- On **September 25, 2026**, a female laboratory worker at the Irkutsk Anti-Plague Institute reportedly broke a test tube containing a suspected infectious agent. She subsequently developed illness and was transported by ambulance to Shelekhov District Hospital.
- **October 1, 2026:** Quarantine was imposed at the inpatient department of Shelekhov District Hospital and died on October 2, 2026. Initial media reports suggested possible pneumonic plague, although the diagnosis had not been officially confirmed.
- **On October 2, 2026**, an extraordinary meeting of the regional sanitary and anti-epidemic commission was held with the participation Rospotrebnadzor leadership, following reports of a suspected particularly dangerous infection. Approximately 189-200 contacts had been identified and placed under medical observation or quarantine. No signs of illness were reported among the contacts.

- On **October 4, Investigators found no pathogens related to her work at the Irkutsk Anti-Plague Institute**, and an expert commission confirmed these findings. Laboratory testing among identified contacts detected two cases of COVID-19 and two cases of rhinovirus infection. No additional infections were detected among institute staff during the previous 10 days. More than 60 colleagues remained isolated within the facility, and several hospitals continued to operate under unexplained restrictions. The situation remains under constant monitoring by Rospotrebnadzor and the regional government.

Disease Information

- Plague is caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*. Human infection can occur through bites from infected fleas, direct contact with infected animals or contaminated materials, or inhalation of infectious respiratory droplets from individuals with pneumonic plague.
- Pneumonic plague is the most severe form of the disease and can spread from person to person through respiratory droplets. Symptoms typically include sudden fever, cough, chest pain, difficulty breathing, and blood-stained sputum. Without prompt antibiotic treatment, the disease may progress rapidly and is frequently fatal.
- The incubation period generally ranges from one to seven days, although primary pneumonic plague may develop within 24 hours following exposure.

Response Measures

- The Irkutsk regional government and Rospotrebnadzor initiated anti-epidemic measures immediately following notification of the suspected case. Epidemiological investigations were conducted with support from specialists from Moscow under a coordinated operational response plan.
- Authorities imposed quarantine measures at Shelekhov District Hospital, restricted admissions and discharges, and suspended laboratory operations. Contact tracing and medical monitoring activities were expanded to include all potentially exposed individuals.
- Residents were advised to rely on official sources of information and avoid spreading rumors while investigations continued. Local authorities also recommend limiting unnecessary travel to affected areas until the public health situation became clearer.
- A biosafety investigation was conducted at the Irkutsk Anti-Plague Institute to determine whether an accident involving pathogenic microorganisms had occurred.

Recommendations

- The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that individuals and public health authorities adopt preventive measures to reduce the risk of plague infection, particularly in areas with active or endemic plague transmission, including:

- **Respiratory Protection:** Avoid close contact (within 2 metres) with individuals who are coughing and reduce time spent in crowded areas to lower the risk of pneumonic plague transmission.
- **Animal Exposure:** Avoid touching dead animals, particularly in plague-endemic areas, to reduce the risk of exposure to *Yersinia pestis*.
- **Insect Protection:** Use insect repellent when visiting plague-endemic areas to reduce the risk of flea-borne transmission associated with bubonic plague.
- **Personal Protection:** Masks may help reduce transmission of pneumonic plague when correctly used by symptomatic individuals to limit infectious respiratory particles and by healthcare workers for personal protection. Masks should be used and disposed of properly to prevent them from becoming a source of infection.
- **Early Medical Care:** Seek immediate medical attention if sudden fever, chills, painful or inflamed lymph nodes, shortness of breath, coughing, or blood-stained sputum develops.
- **Travel Health:** Travelers returning from plague-affected areas who develop compatible symptoms should immediately inform healthcare providers of their travel history.
- **Medication Use:** Avoid self-medication, including the use of antibiotics, unless prescribed by a healthcare professional.

Sources:

1. BlueDot (Event Alert), issued on October 6, 2026.
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3. IRK (October 4, 2026) *Роспотребнадзор: у сотрудницы Иркутского противочумного института выявили пневмонию*. IRK. Retrieved October 6, 2026 from <https://www.irk.ru/news/20261004/pneumonia/>
4. World Health Organization (September 29, 2026) *Questions and Answers: Plague*. WHO. Retrieved October 6, 2026 from <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/plague>

ASEAN Biological Threat Surveillance Centre (ABVC)
 Health Policy Agency
 Ministry of Health of Indonesia
 Building 5 - Global Health Strategy and Governance Policy, 2nd floor
 Jalan Percetakan Negara No. 29 Johar Baru, Jakarta Pusat, Indonesia 10560