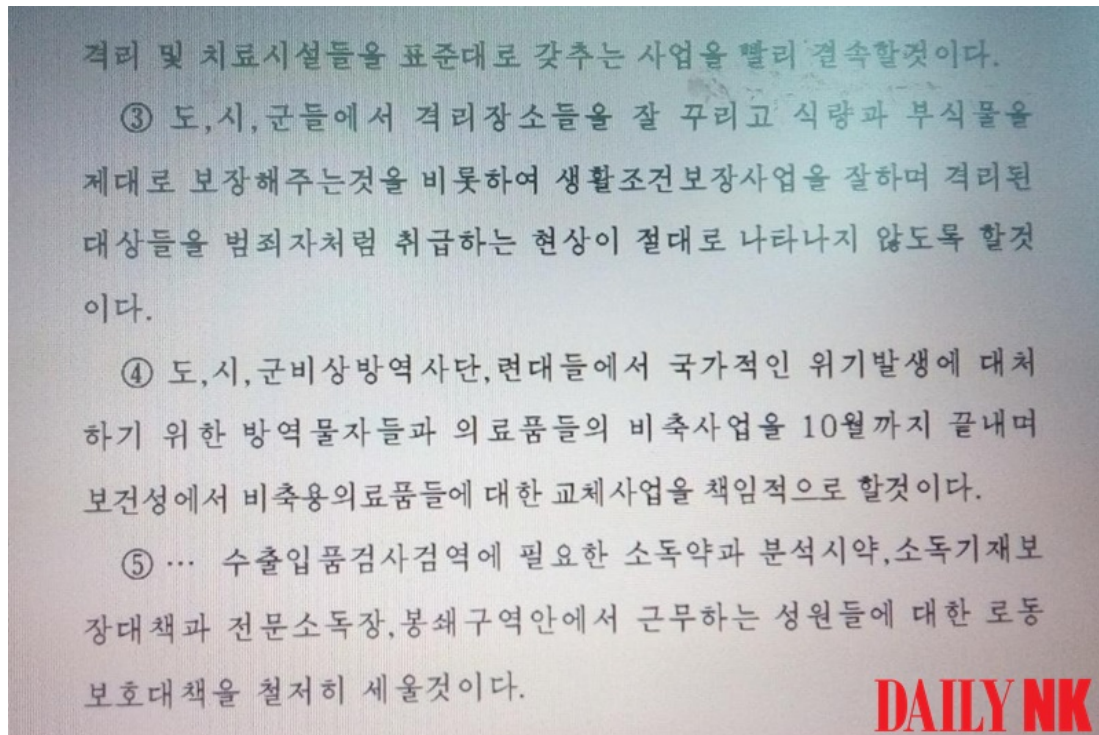


**DAILY NK**

**Special  
Report  
on  
North Korea**

2022.05.

## How North Korea is Dealing with COVID-19



*Internal order issued by the Central Committee in July 2021 in preparation for protracted emergency quarantine efforts. / Photo: Daily NK*

### 1. Implications of North Korea's announcement of a COVID-19 outbreak

- Given the timing of the announcement, the coronavirus appears likely to have spread during the country's recent military parade. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un actively participated in the event, even taking a commemorative photograph with university students involved in the parade. This suggests that the authorities may have tested participants for COVID-19 before and after the event more thoroughly than

before. During this testing process, the authorities may have discovered someone who was infected with the coronavirus

- The authorities may have judged that the country could no longer delay a switch to a policy of “living with COVID-19.” While watching people in other countries return to normal life, North Korea’s leadership may have determined that a “transition period” was in order to achieve similar results
- North Korea suffers from a severe lack of medicine, and the authorities may have announced the outbreak with the intention of receiving medical supplies from abroad
- Given that the country’s leadership has continued to admit to certain governance failures (failures to reach economic targets, the failure to replant trees on mountains), the authorities may have judged that an honest release of the facts along with earnest efforts to resolve the situation may earn support from the people

## **2. The kind of support the country could receive from abroad**

- Currently, North Korea is not likely to receive support from abroad, except from China or Russia. That being said, the leadership could shift its efforts in this regard if the COVID-19 situation gets worse
- Even if the current situation changes, North Korea may emphasize receiving humanitarian support from the international community rather than directly from the US, South Korea, or another specific country
- Even if the country receives support from abroad, the leadership will highlight that the country’s leader is joining hands with the international community to improve the health of the people, not engaging in dialogue or cooperation

### **3. The potential for future provocations**

- There is a high likelihood that North Korea will conduct its seventh nuclear test and/or continue tests of various weapons systems
- Kim Jong Un has emphasized that there must be no disruptions to the country's efforts to build a "socialist prosperous country," including the building of 10,000 new homes, along with the advancement of the country's national defense capabilities
- Indeed, any disruptions to these goals could harm the image of the country's leader

### **4. The country's disease control efforts**

- The State Emergency Anti-Epidemic Command continues to manage the country's disease control efforts, while provinces, cities, counties and even individual companies operate their own emergency anti-epidemic units. Currently, North Korea is in a state of quasi-war against the coronavirus
- The authorities are checking the number of fever patients and deaths everyday and reporting the figures through virtual meetings
- The Ministry of State Security and Ministry of Social Security, along with prosecutors' offices and even party members, are being mobilized en masse for disease control efforts
- Mobile anti-epidemic teams and lockdown teams have been created nationwide to help prevent the spread of the disease
- Military forces have been deployed to help stem the outbreak, and violators of disease control rules are subject to punishment under military law (state-run media

has only emphasized that the military is helping to distribute medicine)

- Currently, cities and counties, and even entire regions, have placed bans on movement. The authorities have completely locked down certain areas whose population has surpassed an unspecified threshold of fever patients (Hyesan and Sinuiju were recently locked down)

## 5. The import and distribution of medical supplies

- Following the public announcement of an outbreak, the authorities immediately requested help from China. The very next day, a large amount of medical supplies were sent into the country through Nampo port



*A picture obtained from a source in North Korea showing the Chinese medicine Lianhua Qingwen Jiaonang. (Daily NK)*

- Normally, the supplies would need to go through a quarantine period, but they were quickly sent to Pyongyang and the country's military
- The authorities have used military stores of medicine to supply other areas of the country (The authorities have simply told people to “endure with a soldiers’ spirit” after it was found the military was short of medicine)

- The country lacks so much medicine that there are reportedly many people who have failed to receive any distributions of drugs. Medicine prices are skyrocketing as a result
- There has been a spread of fake medicine along with medicine with unclear efficacy. There have also been cases of young children dying due to the side-effects of taking adults-only medicine

## **6. How people are being tested for COVID-19 and how sick people are being isolated**

- North Korea urgently needs to conduct testing of its entire population to prevent the spread of the coronavirus
- Tests are being conducted by *inminban* (people's units, similar to a neighborhood watch). People are not going to hospitals or clinics for checkups; rather, doctors and medical staff are coming to them
- The tests involve simple checks of people's temperatures (although in Pyongyang, there have reportedly been tests conducted using people's saliva). Anyone who has a temperature over 38 degrees Celsius for more than two days must go to an isolation facility
- People suffering from coughing are allowed to isolate themselves in their homes (They are considered completely cured after seven days. Meanwhile, those in state-run isolation facilities must stay there for 7-10 days)



*A sign informing people not to enter the building because it is being used as an isolation facility. (Video capture from Red Star TV, YouTube)*

- Isolation centers must find their own food to provide to those in their care. In Pyongyang, those in isolation get corn rice, potatoes, corn soup, and soup with salt and soy sauce. Outside of the capital city, people in isolation centers are not receiving regular supplies of food. That is why provincial party organizations are compelling members of the *donju* (North Korea's wealthy entrepreneurial class) to donate medicines and food in their possession

## **7. The outbreak's impact on North Korea's civilian economy**

- Given that trade through freight trains has been halted and bans have been placed on movement, the government's response to the outbreak could worsen the country's economic troubles
- In fact, in Yanggang Province's Hyesan, which was completely locked down from May 14, there were many households that complained of hardships due to the lack of food
- Over the space of a week starting on May 15, around 20 children with nutritional deficiencies at an orphanage in Pyongyang began suffering from breathing problems

and various other pains. They were taken to Okryu Children's Hospital, where four of the children later died

- Many of the country's factories have stopped operating, with the authorities simply emphasizing that provincial factories should focus solely on producing disease prevention-related products. This situation could lead to problems in the country's production activities going forward
- Social issues arising from the government's response to the outbreak could present a crisis for the regime; specifically, Kim Jong Un's leadership would be put to the test
- North Korea is currently in its rice planting season, and it is highly likely that the authorities will mobilize the country's people en masse to take part in the planting activities. There is the possibility that North Koreans already facing hardships could experience disillusionment with the regime
- In response to this possibility, the authorities will likely intensify surveillance and control over the population under the pretext of stemming the outbreak and providing medical treatment to those in need. This is a good strategy from the perspective of the authorities because no one in the country will be able to criticize the government's actions when the COVID-19 situation gets better

## 8. Reference articles

- [N. Korea determines student infected by COVID-19 attended event featuring Kim Jong Un \(16 May, 2022\)](#)
- [N. Korea reemphasizes orders to use live ammunition against border intruders \(18 May, 2022\)](#)
- [Hyesan put under full lockdown following rapid spread of COVID-19 cases \(18 May,](#)



2022)

- Prices of medications skyrocket in Hyesan following surge of suspected COVID-19 cases (19 May, 2022)
- N. Korea expands personnel of rapid mobile quarantine teams and containment teams nationwide (20 May, 2022)
- N. Korea orders guard posts nationwide to step up efforts to enforce movement bans (23 May, 2022)
- N. Korea conducts mass testing in Pyongyang, people who refuse testing are labeled “disloyal” (23 May, 2022)
- N. Korea’s security agency spreads rumors suggesting a S. Korean connection with the COVID-19 outbreak (21 May, 2022)

**Special Report on North Korea (May 2022)**

**Published by Daily NK**

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