



# Garment worker tests positive for Covid-19, prompting calls to shut factory

2 March 2021 9:59 PM |

Khy Sovuthy



Garment workers travel home from work at a factory on the outskirts of Phnom Penh, March 2, 2021. Panha Chhorpoan

**f** Hundreds of staff at a Phnom Penh garment factory are being tested for Covid-19 after a worker tested positive for the virus, officials said Tuesday, as the tally for infections related to the February 20 outbreak reached 340.

**t** One building at the Y&W Garment factory has been shut down and 500 staff told to stay home, but more than 4,000 staff are expected to continue working, a factory administrator said, raising concern of the virus spreading.

**in** The 48-year-old woman tested positive for the virus alongside her son, who is the possible link to the February 20 outbreak via his job as a driver for a Chinese national, said Chhim Ra, police chief in Spean Thmar commune, Dangkor district.

**📞** "They were sent for treatment at Phnom Penh Quarantine Center", he said, adding that the pair had gone for testing after showing symptoms.

An administrator who answered a phone number listed for the Chinese-owned factory said that the factory would not suspend operations, raising concern among workers, who work, eat and take breaks in close quarters.

Despite working in a different building to the woman who tested positive at Y&W, the news made workers uneasy, said ironing sector staff member at Po Tith.

"I am very concerned because we work in the same factory," he said. "It would easily transmit to other workers because there are so many of us."

Pav Sina, president of the Collective Union of Movement of Workers (CUMW), called for the factory to suspend operations and disinfect the premises for the safety of staff, their families and surrounding community.

"Garment workers all go in and out of one gate. And we don't know where else she has been," Sina said, referring to the woman who tested positive.

The union leader called for the Health Ministry to take control of the factory and the surrounding area and warned that failure to take the situation seriously could be seen as another snub of the country's legion of garment workers by the government.

"We are concerned about the spirit of the workers at this factory and at other factories when this information spreads," he said.

Tens of thousands of people have lost garment sector jobs in the pandemic, while many more, including thousands from Y&W in September, have gone on strike and protested against a roll back of rights.

wages and conditions.

Garment workers were also instructed by the government to work through the Khmer New Year holiday in 2020 to stop the spread of coronavirus.

Ken Loo, secretary-general at the Garment Manufactures Association of Cambodia (GMAC), repeated calls for caution and for factory bosses to implement Covid-19 safety protocols as instructed by the Health Ministry.

Health Ministry spokeswoman Or Vandine and Labour Ministry spokesman Heng Suor could not be reached for comment.



The Health Ministry on Tuesday announced 24 new cases related to the February 20 outbreak that has been linked to Chinese women leaving quarantine facilities. Seventeen of the new cases are in Sihanoukville, taking its February 20 cluster to 47 cases.

On Tuesday evening, the first batch of 324,000 Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccinations arrived at the Phnom Penh International Airport under the Covax Facility, which is set to deliver almost 1.3 million doses to Cambodia.

Plans for the rollout of the vaccine will be made after Prime Minister Hun Sen received his injection at Calmette hospital on Thursday, Health Ministry spokeswoman Or Vandine said at a press conference.

"We will wait to receive advice from Samdech Hun Sen when he is vaccinated," she said.

Dr Li Ailan, head of the World Health organization in Cambodia, called for the public to remain vigilant and follow all protocol as the country deals with its largest outbreak since the pandemic began.

"The virus is running very fast; we must be ahead of the curve," she said.

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