

S Korea added to virus luggage-check list

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A person holds two packs of sausages found in the carry-on luggage of a South Korean traveler at Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport yesterday before they were discarded.

Photo: Chu Pei-hsiung, Taipei Times

Customs officers yesterday started checking the carry-on luggage of travelers arriving from South Korea for pork products after North Korea reported its first outbreak of African swine fever, the Council of Agriculture (COA) said.

There are no direct flights between Taiwan and North Korea.

While South Korea has not reported any infection, the council pre-emptively listed it as a high-risk area for transmission of the deadly disease, which is highly contagious.

North Korea on Thursday reported its first outbreak on a farm in Chagang-Do province, where 99 pigs were culled, the council said, citing information from the World Organisation for Animal Health.

Chagang-Do borders China's Jilin and Liaoning provinces.

Liaoning was the first Chinese province to report an outbreak in August last year.

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North Korea is the fifth Asian nation to report an infection, after China, Mongolia in January, Vietnam in February and Cambodia in April.

Vietnam has reported a total of 2,782 cases across 44 provinces and cities, while China has only reported 140 cases, despite having a larger area, council data as of yesterday showed.

Along with the five nations, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and South Korea were successively listed as high-risk areas, even though they have not yet reported any infection cases.

All carry-on luggage of travelers from high-risk areas must undergo checks by X-ray scanners or airport police and sniffer dogs, the council said, adding that check-in luggage is already subject to checks.

People caught illegally carrying pork imports from areas that have reported African swine fever in the past three years would be fined NT\$200,000 (US\$6,327) for their first violation and NT\$1 million for repeated offenses.

Foreigners who fail to pay the fine at customs would be denied entry into Taiwan.

From Dec. 18 last year to Sunday, the council had issued 293 fines of NT\$200,000 each to 281 people of different nationalities carrying Chinese pork products and 12 people bringing Vietnamese pork products, while 107 foreigners were denied entry for failing to pay the fines.

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