



On May 6, 2020, Dr. Victor Cha, professor and vice-dean at Georgetown University and Korea Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, discussed South Korea's success in managing Covid-19. The speed and preparedness with which the country began testing and contact tracing has set the bar: today, per every person infected, South Korea contact traces and tests 45 individuals. Dr. Cha's description of South Korea's response centered on four main themes--lessons learned from the SARS and MERS epidemics; the importance of early, decisive action; the ability to quickly deploy innovative measures; and the resources for contact tracing. He also provided insight into North Korea's handling of the crisis.

**Lessons from SARS and MERS:** South Korea's success stems from attitudinal shifts caused by its traumatic experience with the SARS and MERS outbreaks. This led to fundamental legislative and civil society changes toward greater transparency, technology usage, PPE production capacity, and overall preparedness. At the outset of the current outbreak, the government quickly convened the public and private sectors to develop test kits and pledged rapid regulatory approval to make needed resources available. The US barely experienced either outbreak, but there is hope for future health crises to be managed more effectively due to the lessons learned from the current one.

**Early action:** Within a month of detecting the first imported case of Covid-19 on Jan. 20, the government rolled out a response and testing regime that included the establishment of a national call center, distribution of masks to front-line workers, administration of test-kits, release of mobile apps for self-diagnosis, and elevating the infectious disease alert level to the highest category of 4 (Red). A [timeline](#) documenting the response can be found on the CSIS Korea Chair website.

**Innovative healthcare facilities and reorganization of existing ones:**

- a) **Drive-through testing:** South Korea has developed drive-through testing facilities to diagnose patients to meet a high demand of testing and avoid widespread infections in hospitals.
- b) **Designated hospitals:** the government has designated some hospitals for Covid-19 patients only, so that patients need not to worry about contracting the virus when seeking treatment for non-Covid-19 issues. These are indicated on different sources, ranging from hospital banners to mobile apps.

**Contact tracing:** Two main mobile apps have been developed to track patients and help the public avoid outbreak areas. Enabled by GPS and Bluetooth technologies, they collect data from public government sources and provide information regarding Covid-19 patients' recent locations and other details without revealing names or identities.

**North Korea:** North Korea's claim to have zero Covid-19 cases is considered unlikely, given its location between two major hotspots and the number of goods and persons which regularly cross its borders. CSIS and NK News have conducted [joint research](#) finding North Korea's response to Covid-19 is remarkably consistent with its past behavior during Ebola and MERS: namely, closing its borders and shutting down domestic and international travel, before asking for international assistance following a few months.

**Insight:** *Absent a scenario where early action was taken, a universal testing regime or a reliable vaccine, any state seeking to reopen should not only allocate resources for testing and contact tracing, but also toward innovative healthcare solutions for a more effective and efficient response.*

This document was prepared by Eugenio Benincasa, Kangkyu Lee, and Ariel Stenek. For more information, please contact Dr. Crystal Pryor ([crystal@pacforum.org](mailto:crystal@pacforum.org)), Director of Nonproliferation, Technology, and Fellowships at Pacific Forum. These preliminary findings provide a general summary of the discussion. This is not a consensus document. The views expressed are those of the HIF chair and do not necessarily reflect the views of all participants. The speaker has approved this summation of his presentation.