

Severe Pneumonia of Unknown Aetiology in Irkutsk Oblast, Russian Federation

Japan Institute for Health Security (JIHS)

As investigations by domestic and international public health authorities and researchers are ongoing, information regarding this event may change substantially after the publication of this document. Readers are advised to consult the latest available information.

Japan Institute for Health Security

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Situation Overview

According to media reports, a staff member of the Irkutsk Antiplague Research Institute of Siberia and the Far East in Irkutsk Oblast, Russian Federation, was hospitalized with severe pneumonia on 29 September 2026 and died on 2 October 2026.

Some media reports have suggested that the individual died of pneumonic plague and that a laboratory incident involving the breakage of a tube containing *Yersinia pestis* occurred during work activities. However, on 4 October 2026, Russian public health authorities reported that the cause of death remained undetermined, that no pathogens related to the individual's occupational activities had been detected, and that no laboratory accident had occurred.

Russian public health authorities have reportedly identified approximately 200 contacts, who are currently under health monitoring in healthcare facilities and other settings. According to available information, no contacts have developed symptoms to date. Furthermore, there have been no reports suggesting an increase in severe pneumonia cases in the affected area.

Based on information currently available, the World Health Organization (WHO) has assessed the public health risk associated with this event as low to moderate in Irkutsk Oblast, low in the Russian Federation, and very low in the WHO European Region. WHO has indicated that the assessment will be updated as additional information becomes available.

Risk Assessment

Although some media reports have attributed this event to pneumonic plague, Russian public health authorities continue to classify the case as severe pneumonia of unknown aetiology.

While the causative pathogen has not yet been identified, contacts of the case have been traced and are under health monitoring, no secondary cases have been confirmed, and there is currently no information indicating an increase in severe pneumonia cases in the affected area. Taken together, the available evidence does not suggest ongoing transmission or wider spread associated with this case.

Based on information available at the time of assessment, the potential impact on Japan is considered limited.

As the causative pathogen has not been identified, continued monitoring of investigation findings and updates regarding the occurrence of respiratory illnesses in the affected area is warranted.

References

- WHO. Suspected plague death in Irkutsk under investigation. Published 6 October 2026. <https://www.unognewsroom.org/story/en/3289/irkutsk-suspected-plague-death-who>
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- ECDC. ECDC closely monitoring the situation following a case of pneumonia of unknown origin in Russia. Published 6 October 2026. <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/news-events/ecdc-closely-monitoring-situation-following-case-pneumonia-unknown-origin-russia>