

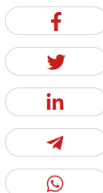


## Garment factory security guard tests positive for Covid-19, as infections grow

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khy Sovuthy



A garment worker is shown quarantined in her rental room after her roommate tested positive for Covid-19, on March 17, 2021. CamboJA/ Pring Samrang



A 21-year-old Phnom Penh woman who works as a garment factory security guard tested positive for Covid-19 on Tuesday and was sent for treatment, while six others who had been in direct contact with her were ordered to quarantine for 14 days in their rental rooms in Sen Sok district's Toek Thla commune.

Mich Meas, a Toek Thla commune police officer, said the guard who tested positive was brought to the hospital for treatment on Tuesday night. On Wednesday morning, "health officials took samples from six people who had direct contact with her, including four garment workers from Trax Apparel factory," he said.

He said Health and Labor Ministries officials are working with the factory, though he did not know if the factory would be temporarily closed.

Trax Apparel (Cambodia) Company produces sportswear for several major brands including Adidas, NB, and Puma and has 1,500 workers, according to its website.

Kanika, 29, one of the six people now in quarantine said the security guard was responsible for taking the temperatures of workers entering and leaving the factory. The guard, who lived with her and three other women, hadn't been to work since March 12, when she came down with a fever. On March 14 she went for testing at the Khmer-Soviet Friendship Hospital before returning to the shared rental room.

"The three other workers and myself are very concerned because we live together in one room with her," Kanika said. "We are at a high risk of infection from her."

She said that she and the three others remain in good health for the time being.

An administration officer at Trax Apparel, who declined to give his name, said officials from the Health and Labor Ministries visited the factory to advise its owners and they sprayed the building with disinfectant. The factory closed for half a day on Wednesday, he said.

"There were four workers in direct contact and about 30 workers who had indirect contact with the worker who tested positive of Covid-19," he said, adding that they had been tested for the virus.

Thy Bopha, 21, a garment worker at Trax Apparel said she heard that a guard was infected but didn't know the details. On Wednesday, she said, the factory was open after lunch.

She said that she always wears a mask and regularly cleans her hands with alcohol and tries to follow social distancing guidelines.

"I'm concerned about infection in the factory but it's up to the factory owner whether they suspend operations or allow workers work as normal," said Bopha.





Garment workers buy food in front of the Trax Apparel factory, one day after a factory guard was brought to the hospital upon testing positive for Covid-19, March 17, 2021. Cambodia/ Pring Samrang

Pav Sina, president of the Collective Union of Movement of Workers (CUMW) said that this is the second case linked to a factory after a worker at Y&W Garment Factory tested positive for Covid-19 earlier this month. Since the sick guard was responsible for checking the health of all who entered and exited Trax Apparel, the factory should test all the workers, he said.

"I think there is high risk infection for the other workers," said Sina, adding that a half-day closure was not sufficient and that all workers should be quarantined for 14 days and tested before returning.

Heng Sour, Labor Ministry's spokesman declined to comment, referring questions to the Health Ministry.

"No one has the technical knowledge apart from the health officials. If health officials told them to stop, they must stop, but if health officials said they can work, they can do so" Sour said.

On March 2, a 48-year-old garment worker at Y&W garment factory tested positive for the virus along with her son, whose case may have been linked to the February 20 outbreak through his job as a driver for a Chinese national.

Prime Minister Hun Sen said in voice message posted on his Facebook page on Tuesday that he ordered the Health Ministry set a schedule for vaccinating garment workers once the next vaccine shipment arrives from China.

Last week, a 50-year-old Cambodian man died from Covid-19, marking Cambodia's first death from the disease. The country's Covid-19 tally reached 1,505 as of Wednesday morning, of which more than 990 have been traced to the February 20 outbreak.

According to the Health Ministry, more than 170,000 people had received at least one dose of the two vaccines available in the country as of March 14. Additionally, 108,648 security personnel have been inoculated as well, most receiving only their first dose of the vaccine.

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