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Effects of coronavirus felt at educational institutions and Dutch Contact Lens Congress is postponed

More than 100 countries have reported cases of the COVID-19 virus in a rapidly changing situation. Educational institutions are among those feeling the impact as the virus spreads around the world and major meetings in Europe and Asia are the first to be postponed



In China, where the first cases of the new coronavirus were reported late last year, the situation is now improving, according to Shanghai-based China National Coordinator **Qu Xiaomei**. But schools could not open normally and students were taking online classes at home. 'Educators and students have had to change the style of learning and more online teaching materials are needed,' she said.

The impact of the virus has also been felt at institutions in South Korea, where all universities have postponed the start of the next semester until mid-to-late March at the earliest. 'It depends on the future situation,' said Korea National Coordinator **Professor Kyounghee Park** of Kookje University. 'In my opinion, all universities will start the semester on either 23 or 30 March, depending on the decision of the Education Ministry.'

‘Educators and students are confused about the delay in starting times,’ she added. ‘As all universities must keep at least for 15 weeks per semester, we can't help having to teach until the end of June or the first week in July.’

Universities might run a combination of offline and online learning to minimize disruption. 'Some have good facilities to deliver online lectures but others don't,' said Kyounghee. She also warned that COVID-19 would have an adverse effect on the optometry industry.

FIACLE **Dr Fabrizio Zeri** from the University of Milano-Bicocca in Italy reported that, since the end of February, clusters of COVID-19 cases had been reported in some regions in the north of Italy and in the following days the number of registered cases increased suddenly. Within a few days, Italy had become the European country most affected by the virus.

This situation led the Italian authorities, as a precautionary measure, to close schools and universities to students in three regions in the north of Italy. Three optometry courses, one in Milan, one in Padua, and one in Bologna were involved in the closure. But on 4 March it was announced that all Italian schools and universities would be closed until mid-March.

Also, the annual MIDO trade fair in the northern city of Milan that was due to take place from 29 February - 2 March has been postponed until July.

Fabrizio commented: 'To avoid a delay at the start of the second semester, our University of Milano-Bicocca decided to deliver lectures online through the "E-learning" platform, although labs and clinic activities have to wait. The situation is still evolving, let's hope the measures adopted can lead us out from these trying times soon.'

On 8 March, travel and other restrictions were brought in across northern Italy and these were extended across the country from 10 March. Schools and universities would now remain closed until April, and examinations were cancelled.

Organizers of the Netherlands Contactlens Congress, due to be held in Holland on 15-16 March, announced on 4 March that the meeting had been postponed and would be rescheduled for later this year. And the Asia Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology Congress in Xiamen, China has also been postponed, from 24-26 April until 5-9 August.

USEFUL LINKS FOR MORE INFORMATION

World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

The Lancet: <https://www.thelancet.com/coronavirus>

Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.chinacdc.cn/en/COVID19/>

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

CDC Information for Healthcare Professionals: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/index.html>

American Academy of Ophthalmology: <https://www.aao.org/headline/alert-important-coronavirus-context>

NHS England: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/covid-19-primary-care-sop-optical-settings-v1.pdf>