

Invalidation of Short-term Visa, Temporary Suspension of Visa Waiver and Visa-Free Entry Programs to Take Effect

- Entry restrictions stepped up to stem imported COVID-19 infections-

- The Republic of Korea (ROK) is seeing a nationwide downward trend of its novel coronavirus (COVID-19) infection cases. Nevertheless, the general public remains largely concerned over the infectious virus coming from overseas as countries around the globe are grappling with the aggravating COVID-19 pandemic situation.
- The ROK government has strengthened quarantine measures on foreign entrants, including a mandatory 14-day quarantine to prevent imported novel coronavirus infections. However, the country continues to report new COVID-19 confirmed cases from international arrivals.
 - ※ The nation has a total of 66 confirmed cases of COVID-19 among foreign entrants as of April 8.
- In addition, the continuous inflow of short-stay visitors who are placed under a mandatory quarantine* in government-facilities has become a burden to the nation's resources to deal with the disease. Moreover, foreign entrants disregarding quarantine rules such as non-payment of quarantine expenses have become a detriment to the nation's administrative capacity.
 - * A total of 880 foreigners are quarantined in temporary facilities as of April 7.
 - ** 16 foreigners in total have been denied entry/ deported due to refusal to be facility-quarantined from April 1 to April 7, 2020.
- In response to this, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) have jointly decided to take the following measures that include invalidation of short-term visas and temporary suspension of visa waiver and visa-free entry programs, which aim to alleviate the public's growing concern over the imported COVID-19 infections and enable the nation to efficiently utilize resources to combat the epidemic by bringing down the inflow of overseas arrivals with strengthened visa screenings and enhanced entry restrictions.
 1. Short-term visa validity is temporarily suspended.
 - All short-term visas (stays up to 90 days), single and multiple, issued to foreign nationals prior to April 5, 2020 by Korean diplomatic missions abroad (embassy, consulate general, etc.) are temporarily suspended.

- All short-term visas, single and multiple, issued on or before April 5, 2020 are invalidated meaning that the relevant visa holders have to re-apply for a visa to a Korean embassy or consulate. (Visa fees are waived)
- Yet, those with short-term employment (C-4) status such as highly skilled technicians invited by Korean companies and long-term (employment and investment) visa holders are still permitted to enter the ROK with their current visas as they are not subject to the invalidation measure.
- In addition, short-term visitors who have already entered the nation are allowed to stay within their granted period of stay.
- In implementation of the measure, the Ministry of Justice will automatically block air carriers/ship companies from issuing a boarding pass to those seeking entry with invalidated visas through the i-PreChecking system, further banning them from boarding any flight or ship bound to the ROK. In addition, immigration officers at points of entry will inspect once again at the stage of immigration clearance.

2. Visa waiver and visa-free entry programs are restricted, on reciprocal basis, for countries which have imposed entry bans on Korean nationals.

- Among the 148 countries and regions that have implemented entry bans on Korean nationals, this temporary suspension measure will apply to 90 countries and regions that have a visa waiver or a visa free-entry program with the ROK.

※ Countries subject to temporary suspension of Visa waiver /Visa-free entry programs: 90 countries and regions (56 with Visa Waiver Program and 34 with Visa-Free Entry Program, as of April 8).

- Under this measure, holders of passport of the affected 90 countries and regions are required to obtain a new visa from overseas Korean diplomatic missions for entry into the ROK.
- However, diplomatic/ official passport holders, flight (ship) crew members bound to ROK points of entry and ABTC* holders are still allowed visa-free entry into the ROK as an exception.

* APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC) allows visa-free entry to visit 19 ABTC member countries among the APEC countries.

○ The i-PreChecking system operated by the MOJ will automatically block air carriers/ship companies from issuing a boarding pass to those seeking entry without valid visas, further prohibiting them from boarding any inbound flight or vessel into the ROK. Moreover, immigration inspectors at points of entry will make sure to provide seamless border protection by conducting inspection during immigration clearance.

3. Visa screening procedure will be strengthened for all visa applicants.

○ All visa applicants including those whose visas have been nullified under this new policy are obligated to submit a medical diagnosis certificate issued by a medical institution.

- All visa applicants are required to go through a medical screening at medical institutions within 48 hours of application and submit the medical diagnosis stating the relevant examination results.

- The medical diagnosis certificate has to detail the COVID-19 related symptoms including fever, cough, chills, headache, deep muscle pain, pneumonia and others, and those found to have suspicious symptoms will have restrictions from visa issuance.

○ Furthermore, all overseas Korean embassies and consulates will adopt a rigorous review process before deciding to grant a visa, which includes health status interview, since receipt of visa applications.

- Yet, visa granting procedure can be facilitated, at the discretion of head of a diplomatic mission abroad, for family members of Korean nationals and those with diplomatic/public duties, essential business purposes such as investment/technology provision and urgent humanitarian reasons.

All the measures above will come into force as of midnight, April 13, 2020 to be applied based on the local departure time.

※ Suspension of Visa Waiver Program may take some additional time before coming into effect, after the notification is made.

The Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will remain committed to carrying out follow-up measures to ensure that these new policies are implemented in a strict and expeditious way.

- The MOJ will notify air carriers/ship companies providing services to Korea of the said measures through the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries and regional immigration offices, requiring them to fulfill their obligations such as checking whether their travelers hold a valid visa.
- The MOFA will immediately notify relevant foreign countries, through diplomatic channels, of these new measures including visa invalidation, suspension of visa waiver program and restrictions on visa-free entry program for expeditious implementation of suspension of visa waiver program.
- The Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will continue to make endeavors to stem the inflow of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) from overseas while maintaining close cooperation on relevant information sharing with the Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasures Headquarters (CDSCH).