

Kim Jong-un reported to have undergone heart surgery as coronavirus strikes North Korea

Supreme Leader of North Korea Kim Jong Un may be receiving further treatment after undergoing heart surgery.

Kim's last public appearance was earlier this month at a politburo meeting, but the leader missed a public celebration of the birthday of Kim Il Sung, Kim's grandfather. Kim's absence led to speculation about his health.

"My understanding is that he had been struggling [with heart problems] since last August but it worsened after repeated visits to Mount Paektu," an anonymous source told Daily NK, a North Korean news site.

Sources report that Kim's health situation was exacerbated by obesity, stress and heavy smoking. However, according to Yonhap News, a North Korean government official said there was "no special estimate [for Kim Jong Un's health abnormalities.]"

Newsweek reached out to the British Embassy in North Korea for comment.

North Korea has recently begun to admit coronavirus cases exist in the country, telling residents only three cases have been acknowledged, according to an anonymous source.

In February, North Korea closed its borders in order to mitigate the spread of coronavirus. "In case the infectious disease spreading beyond control finds its way into our country, it will entail serious consequences," Kim reportedly said at a February meeting with leaders of the Workers' Party. "No special cases must be allowed within the state anti-epidemic system."

Regardless, the U.S. has officially okayed a shipment of goods to North Korea in order to ensure the country had needed supplies.

"In the face of the extraordinary threat to global health and welfare caused by the COVID pandemic, the United States has expeditiously facilitated the approval of

assistance from the U.S. and international aid and health organizations to counter and contain the spread of coronavirus in the [Democratic People's Republic of Korea]," a State Department spokesperson told *Newsweek* Monday.

While the U.S. currently has no diplomatic relationship with North Korea, President Donald Trump visited North Korea in 2019. Both Trump and Kim spoke highly of each other after the meeting.

"This has a lot of significance because it means that we want to bring an end to the unpleasant past and try to create a new future," Kim said at the time.

"A lot of progress has been made," Trump said. "A lot of friendships have been made and this has been in particular a great friendship."

Attempts to strike a nuclear deal between the two countries which would have eased sanctions against North Korea fell through, leading North Korea to resume missile testing later that year. Short-range missiles were fired by the country in a display North Korean officials said were part of a celebration of Kim Il Sung's birthday.



North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un, shown here before a meeting with US President Donald Trump on the south side of the Military Demarcation Line that

divides North and South Korea in 2019, is reportedly recovering after surgery. BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/AFP/GETTY

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