

Three new cases of MERS virus confirmed in Saudi: WHO

August 1 2013

Three women have contracted the deadly MERS virus in Saudi Arabia, which has been hardest hit by the enigmatic disease, the World Health Organisation said Thursday.

One of the patients is a 67-year-old woman from Riyadh with underlying medical conditions, but who was not known to have come into contact with animals or another sufferer of the virus.

The other two patients diagnosed with Middle East Respiratory Syndrome were health care workers who had been exposed to other MERS patients.

According to the WHO, 46 of the 94 people confirmed to have been infected have died from MERS since September 2012.

Concerns about the virus have led Saudi Arabia to restrict visas for the hajj pilgrimage in October, during which millions of Muslims flock to the holy sites of Mecca and Medina.

Experts are struggling to understand MERS, which still lacks a vaccine and which has an extremely high [fatality rate](#) of more than 51 percent.

It is considered a cousin of the SARS virus that erupted in Asia in 2003 and infected 8,273 people, nine percent of whom died.

Like SARS, MERS is thought to have jumped from animals to humans,

and shares the former's flu-like symptoms—but differs by causing [kidney failure](#).

Scientists studying the new virus have found older patients, men, and people with underlying medical conditions are those particularly at risk.

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