

# Three suspected cases of SARS-related virus in France

May 10 2013, by Greg Keller

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French health officials said Friday they are investigating three suspected cases of a deadly new respiratory virus related to SARS, in people who had close contact in the hospital with France's only confirmed case.

Beatrice Degrugillers, a spokeswoman for the regional health agency in France's Nord-Pas-de-Calais region, said a nurse at the hospital where the man was hospitalized in late April has herself been under watch at the hospital in Douai since Thursday night.

A doctor and a former hospital roommate who had each been in contact with the first patient also remain hospitalized. Test results are expected later Friday.

If confirmed, the additional cases would heighten concerns about the virus' ability to spread easily between people. Health authorities have previously said the new coronavirus has spread in limited circumstances between people in very close contact, such as relatives taking care of family members.

In 2003, the spread of SARS in hospitals in Asia ultimately sparked a global outbreak. Officials consider any spread of a new virus in hospitals to be the first sign it is gaining the ability to infect humans easily.

On Wednesday authorities announced the 65-year-old Frenchman was France's first confirmed case of the novel coronavirus, which has killed 18 people since being identified last year in the Middle East.

The patient fell ill after returning from a nine-day vacation in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates as part of a package tour, the Health Ministry said.

The man, whose identity was not released, returned from Dubai on April 17. He was hospitalized with respiratory problems in the northern French city of Valenciennes on April 23, and transferred to a more advanced facility in Douai on April 29.

Paris' Pasteur Institute analyzed the man's virus and confirmed that it is a novel coronavirus.

Since September 2012, the World Health Organization has been informed of 30 confirmed cases of the virus, and 18 of the patients have died. Cases have emerged in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the UAE, Qatar, Britain and Germany, and health officials say the virus has likely already spread from person to person in some circumstances.

Since the virus emerged last year, European authorities have put in place monitoring measures. In France, 20 people have already been examined for suspected cases of the virus, but the other 19 turned up negative, Health Minister Marisol Touraine said.

The patient who traveled to Dubai is the only positive case. His family members have been tested and are not infected.

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Citation: Three suspected cases of SARS-related virus in France (2013, May 10) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-05-cases-sars-related-virus-france.html>

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