

Death toll from SARS-like virus hits 27

May 29 2013

The global death toll from a SARS-like virus has risen to 27, the World Health Organization said Wednesday after three patients died in hard-hit Saudi Arabia and another in France.

The new virus was last week renamed the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus, or MERS, reflecting the fact that the bulk of cases are in that region.

There have been 38 confirmed infections in Saudi Arabia, with 22 fatalities, according to WHO figures.

The UN health agency logs cases and deaths according to the country where the individual is thought to have caught the disease, with its Saudi toll including one individual who subsequently died in Britain.

Previously known as nCoV-EMC novel coronavirus, the disease is a cousin of, [Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome](#) (SARS), which sparked a world health scare in 2003 when it leapt from animals to humans in Asia and went on to kill some 800 people.

Like SARS, the [new virus](#) appears to cause an infection deep in the lungs, with patients suffering from a temperature, cough and breathing difficulty. But it differs from SARS in that it also causes rapid [kidney failure](#).

Health officials have expressed concern about the high rate of fatalities compared to the number of cases, warning that the disease could spark a

new global crisis if it acquires an ability to spread more easily.

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