

France says new suspected cases of MERS virus

June 12 2013

France's health ministry said Wednesday that a man suspected of having contracted MERS had tested negative for the SARS-like virus which has killed more than 30 people, mostly in Saudi Arabia.

France has had two confirmed cases of MERS to date, one of them fatal.

The man who died, in the northern town of Lille last month, was 65 and had recently returned from Dubai. He is believed to have infected a patient who was sharing a hospital room with him before he was diagnosed. The second man is still in hospital.

The health ministry said there had since been 50 suspected cases of MERS in France but they had all proven to be false alarms.

In the latest scare, two men were reported to have been hospitalised in the town of Tours southwest of Paris on Tuesday. The virus was quickly ruled out as an explanation for the symptoms of one of them and tests cleared the other one.

The [World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) said on June 7 that there had been 55 laboratory-confirmed cases of the virus, 31 of which had resulted in the affected individuals dying.

Previously known as novel coronavirus, the disease was last month renamed Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus, or MERS-CoV.

The WHO believes 26 of the 31 people who have died contracted the virus in Saudi Arabia.

The virus is a cousin of [Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome](#) (SARS), which killed 800 people in Asia in 2003.

Like SARS, MERS appears to cause a [lung infection](#), with patients suffering from a temperature, cough and [breathing difficulty](#).

But it differs in that it also causes rapid [kidney failure](#) and the extremely high death rate has caused serious concern among health experts.

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