

WHO raises MERS virus death toll to 31

June 7 2013

The World Health Organization on Friday formally raised the global death toll from the SARS-like virus MERS to 31, after a new fatality in hard-hit Saudi Arabia.

In a statement, the UN agency said that the victim was an 83-year-old man from the eastern region of Al-Ahsaa, where an outbreak began in a [healthcare facility](#) in April.

The man fell ill on May 27 and died on May 31, WHO said.

"Globally, from September 2012 to date, WHO has been informed of a total of 55 laboratory-confirmed cases of infection with MERS-CoV, including 31 deaths," it said in a statement.

Previously known as novel coronavirus, the disease was last month renamed Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus, or MERS-CoV, reflecting the fact that the bulk of the cases are in that region.

There have now been 41 confirmed cases in Saudi Arabia, 26 of them fatal, according to WHO figures.

WHO records cases and deaths according to the country where the individual is thought to have caught the disease, rather than where they died, and its Saudi toll includes a person who subsequently died in Britain.

One person has died in France after catching the disease in the [United](#)

[Arab Emirates](#), just like a fatality in Germany.

There have also been two cases in Jordan, both of them fatal, as well as two in Qatar, with those patients treated in Britain and Germany

Two patients caught the disease in Britain from an individual who had been to the Middle East, one of whom died.

Tunisia has seen two non-fatal cases and Italy two—one of whom caught the virus in Jordan and gave it to a contact in Italy—while France has recorded one.

The virus is a cousin of [Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome](#) (SARS), which sparked a global scare in 2003 after jumping to humans from animals in Asia and claiming 800 lives.

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](#).

Health officials have expressed concern about the high proportion of deaths relative to the number of cases, warning that MERS could spark a new global crisis if it manages to spread more easily.

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