

Saudi announces four new deaths from MERS virus

June 17 2013

Four more people have died from the MERS virus in Saudi Arabia, bringing the death toll from the SARS-like virus in the kingdom to 32, the health ministry said Monday.

Two people died in the western city of Taif and the other two were pronounced dead in Eastern Province, where most cases have been registered, the ministry said on its website.

The ministry announced three more confirmed cases of people in Saudi Arabia infected with the virus, which the [World Health Organisation](#) has dubbed the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus, or MERS.

One case of infection was in Eastern Province and another in the capital Riyadh, while the third was of a two-year-old boy in the western city of Jeddah who was suffering from a "chronic" [lung problem](#).

The other two cases are of a 63-year-old woman suffering from several [chronic diseases](#) and a 42-year-old man with [chronic asthma](#), it said.

The ministry said the total number of MERS infections in the kingdom now stood at 49, including the 32 fatalities.

The WHO said Monday 64 laboratory-confirmed cases of the disease had surfaced worldwide to date, including 38 deaths.

While most of the cases have been concentrated in Saudi Arabia, the

virus has also spread in Jordan, Qatar and the [United Arab Emirates](#).

Cases have also been found in France, Germany, Italy, Tunisia and Britain, though mainly concerning patients transferred there for care from the Middle East or who had travelled to the Middle East and become ill after they returned, WHO said.

In addition, there has been "limited local transmission" to people in those countries who had not been to the Middle East but who "had been in close contact with the laboratory-confirmed or probable cases," it added.

The virus is a member of the [coronavirus](#) family, which includes the pathogen that causes [Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome](#) (SARS).

SARS sparked global panic in 2003 after it jumped to humans from animals in Asia and killed some 800 people.

Like SARS, MERS appears to cause a lung infection, with patients suffering from a temperature, cough and breathing trouble. But it differs in that it also causes rapid kidney failure.

Scientists at the Erasmus medical centre in the Dutch city of Rotterdam have suggested that bats could be a natural source for the virus.

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

The WHO has so far refrained from advising special travel or trade restrictions to keep the virus from spreading, although it does urge countries and health care workers in particular to be vigilant and report any suspected cases.

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