

False alarm over suspected new MERS infection in France

October 30 2013

A patient suspected of having contracted the MERS coronavirus has tested negative for the lethal respiratory disease, France's health ministry has announced.

The ministry had initially said Tuesday that a person who had just returned from Saudi Arabia, where the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) first appeared in September 2012, was likely infected by the virus.

But in-depth tests on the 43-year-old patient revealed that they had not been infected.

"The two cases identified in May 2013 are therefore the only two confirmed cases in France so far," it said in a statement.

Of these two cases, one patient fell ill when he came back from a trip to Dubai and later died on May 28.

He is believed to have infected the other person, who is still hospitalised in the northern city of Lille but no longer carries the virus.

MERS has so far claimed 62 lives worldwide, with the greatest number of deaths in Saudi Arabia, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The WHO said Tuesday that there were a total of 145 laboratory-

confirmed cases of the respiratory disease worldwide.

Experts are struggling to understand MERS, for which there is no vaccine.

It is considered a deadlier but less-transmissible cousin of the SARS virus that erupted in Asia in 2003 and infected 8,273 people, nine percent of whom died.

Like SARS, MERS appears to cause a lung infection, with [patients](#) suffering from a temperature, cough and breathing difficulty. Early symptoms can also be stomach problems such as diarrhoea.

But it differs in that it also causes rapid kidney failure and the extremely high death rate has caused serious concern.

In August, researchers pointed to the Arabian camel as a possible host of the virus.

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