

Saudi MERS death toll rises to 63

March 15 2014

Saudi health authorities said Saturday a young man had died from the MERS coronavirus, bringing the death toll from the respiratory disease in the worst-hit country to 63.

The 19-year-old national, who died in Riyadh, had been suffering from chronic illnesses, the health ministry said.

Four other people began suffering from the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome after coming into contact with infected people, the ministry said. Among them were two women, aged 18 and 22.

That brought the total number of cases in Saudi Arabia to 156 people since the virus first appeared in September 2012.

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

A study last month said the virus has been "extraordinarily common" in camels for at least 20 years, and may have been passed directly from the animals to humans.

MERS 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.

The World Health Organisation said at the end of February that it has been told of 184 cases of MERS infection worldwide, including 80

deaths.

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