

# Filipino tests negative for Middle East virus

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Philippine Health Secretary Enrique Ona gestures as he talks with officials at the Department of Health in Manila, Philippines on Saturday, April 19, 2014. A Filipino nurse who tested positive for the Middle East virus has been found free of infection in a subsequent examination after he returned home, Ona said. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)

A Filipino nurse who tested positive for the Middle East virus has been found free of infection in a subsequent examination after he returned home, Philippine health officials said Saturday.

The news came as authorities in Saudi Arabia reported additional infections in the Red Sea city of Jiddah, which has seen a spike in cases in recent weeks.

The Filipino man returned Tuesday on an Etihad Airways flight and immediately subjected himself to quarantine along with relatives and others who greeted him on arrival from the United Arab Emirates, Health Secretary Enrique Ona said.

"Fortunately, as well as for the comfort of everybody, the findings of our Research Institute for Tropical Medicine, he tested negative," Ona said.

The nurse was a co-worker of a Filipino paramedic who died from infection in the UAE on April 10.

Ona said the government has been trying to locate all 415 passengers from Tuesday's Flight 0424 from Abu Dhabi to Manila for testing for the frequently deadly virus.

He also urged other Filipinos returning from the Middle East with flu-like symptoms to report to the nearest hospital.

Abu Dhabi-based Etihad has said that [health](#) authorities in the Emirates were also contacting the passengers while crew members were being screened for the virus.

Saudi Arabia's Health Ministry on Saturday separately reported seven new confirmed cases of MERS in Jiddah, including two people who died. It had reported additional new infections in the western city and the capital, Riyadh, a day earlier.

Spokesman Dr. Khalid al-Marghalani said the ministry expects that international researchers will be visiting the kingdom before the end of

the month for consultations on the increased number of cases there.

A tally provided by the Saudi ministry records a total of 76 fatalities among some 231 confirmed cases in the kingdom since the virus was identified in 2012.

In the Philippines, Emerging Infectious Diseases Program Manager Dr. Lyndon Lee Suy said there was currently no epidemic of the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, or MERS, and the World Health Organization has not issued any restrictions on traveling to or from the Middle East, where more than 1 million Filipinos work.

Lee Suy said 119 passengers had been contacted and 72 tested, with 40 so far showing no infection.

He said all the nurse's relatives and well-wishers who welcomed him home had also tested negative for the virus. The nurse will undergo another test before being discharged.

Ona said the nurse had not shown any flu-like symptoms typical of infection from the virus such as fever, cough and cold.

More than 20 people, many of them health care workers, have been reported infected with the MERS coronavirus in two distinct clusters—in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates—likely involving human-to-human transmission since early last week.

The disease, originally identified in 2012 in the Middle East, has also for the first time spread to the Far East, which grappled with an outbreak of the related SARS virus, which killed about 800 people in a global outbreak in 2003.

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