

Saudi reports five new MERS deaths, taking toll to 92

April 26 2014

The Saudi health ministry on Saturday announced five new deaths from the MERS coronavirus, taking the country's death toll to 92.

A statement released overnight added that 14 new cases of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome were detected in the kingdom, bringing the total to 313 since the virus first emerged there in September 2012.

Among the five who died were two elderly Palestinians and a Bangladeshi woman in her 40s, the statement said. The two other victims were Saudis.

Public concern over the spread of MERS mounted last week after the resignation of at least four doctors at Jeddah's King Fahd Hospital who refused to treat patients for fear of infection.

On Thursday King Abdullah visited the Red Sea city and commercial hub in a bid to reassure the public amid fears the virus had mutated to make it more transmissible from person to person.

National Guard Minister Prince Mitab said his father King Abdullah went to Jeddah "to reassure the public and to prove that the exaggerated and false rumours about coronavirus are not true."

"The MERS situation is reassuring and it has not reached the level of an epidemic," he said.

That did not stop the king from dismissing health minister Abdullah al-Rabiah on Monday without an official explanation.

Labour Minister Adel Fakieh, who has taken over as acting [health](#) minister, has promised "transparency and to promptly provide the media and society with the information needed."

The World Health Organisation announced Wednesday that it had offered to send international experts to Saudi Arabia to investigate "any evolving risk" associated with the transmission pattern of the virus.

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

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