Jordan reports new MERS death

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A man has died in Jordan after being infected with the MERS virus, the government said Monday, on the eve of a World Health Organisation emergency meeting on the disease.

The latest death brings to five the number of fatalities in Jordan from the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus since it first emerged in 2012.

The man, in his 50s, worked in a private hospital and died on Sunday, the health ministry said.

The announcement came after Saudi Arabia on Sunday reported that three new deaths from MERS had taken its death toll from the disease to 142.

MERS has now infected 483 people in the Gulf kingdom since it first appeared in 2012, accounting for the vast majority of the 496 cases registered worldwide.

It is considered a deadlier but less-transmissible cousin of the SARS virus that erupted in Asia in 2003, infecting 8,273 people and killing nearly 800.

Like SARS, it appears to cause a lung infection, with patients suffering coughing, breathing difficulties and a temperature, but MERS differs in that it also causes rapid kidney failure.

Although most MERS infections have been in Saudi Arabia, cases have also been recorded in the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and even the United States.

Most cases outside Saudi Arabia involve people who had travelled to the kingdom or worked there, often as medical staff.

The UN's health agency WHO is to hold an emergency meeting Tuesday to discuss the worrying spread of MERS.

"The increase in the number of cases in different countries raises a number of questions," WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic said on Friday, without elaborating.

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