

# Singapore to test for fever in visitors from MERS-hit Middle East

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Asian transport hub Singapore said Thursday it will begin checking travelers from the Middle East for fever, tightening its guard against the MERS virus which has killed 157 people in Saudi Arabia.

"We intend to commence temperature screening at air checkpoints for passengers arriving from affected countries in the Middle East from 18 May 2014," the health ministry said in a statement.

Fever is a symptom of the flu-like MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome) virus, and those found with higher temperatures will be assessed further. Travellers suspected of having the virus will be sent to hospital.

The move is in line with a warning by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on Wednesday for countries to bolster their defences against the virus, the ministry said.

It said no cases of the virus have been detected in the city-state so far.

While the risk of an outbreak remains low, the possibility of an imported case "cannot be ruled out given today's globalised travel patterns", the ministry added.

MERS symptoms can also include chills, cough and in serious cases, kidney failure.

Health authorities say it is transmissible mainly through close person-to-person contact and in healthcare settings.

WHO on Wednesday told countries to improve infection prevention and control, collect more data on the virus and to be more vigilant in preventing it from spreading to vulnerable countries, notably in Africa.

A total of 571 MERS cases have been reported to the WHO, of which 171 have proved fatal. In many of them, victims caught the virus in hospital from other patients, although experts believe camels may also spread the disease.

The virus, which originated in Saudi Arabia and has since spread to over a dozen countries, is considered a deadlier but less-transmissible cousin of the SARS [virus](#) that appeared in Asia in 2003 and infected 8,273 people, nine percent of whom died.

SARS, or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, caused economic chaos in Asia, including in Singapore, as travel ground to a halt.

Singapore, a key Asian transport and financial hub, welcomed a record 15.5 million visitors last year, up 7.2 percent from 2012.

Changi Airport also handled a record 53.7 million international passengers in 2013.

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