

Filipino nurse thought to have MERS virus did not

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The Filipino nurse who was thought to have contracted Middle East respiratory syndrome while working in Saudi Arabia never had the virus, Philippine health officials said Friday.

The attempts to trace all of the nurse's fellow passengers from Saudi Arabian Airlines Flight 870 and Cebu Pacific Flight 997 last week have been ordered stopped, Department of Health spokesman Dr. Lyndon Lee Suy said.

The woman was put under quarantine when she arrived home based on initial test results thought to be positive, but the [health](#) department spokesman said the confirmatory tests came back negative. The Saudi hospital where the nurse worked also clarified that their tests showed she was free of the virus. Lee Suy explained the second MERS case was announced on Wednesday based on the report of the nurse's co-worker who flew home with her. She called the health department after receiving word from her supervisor nurse that the first nurse tested positive for MERS. That nurse and her family were also put under quarantine but subsequently released from hospital. Lee Suy said the steps the department took were consistent with its "rumor surveillance" procedures. "Everything starts with a rumor. What if it turned out to be true? It is up to us to validate," he told reporters. "We don't consider it a mistake, but a part of process and investigation." The negative result means the Philippines has had just one case of MERS—a Filipino [nurse](#) working in the United Arab Emirates who came home in April. Subsequent tests found him free of infection.

Because that case originated abroad, health authorities said the Philippines remains free of the MERS coronavirus.

The World Health Organization has recorded 837 confirmed MERS infections with at least 291 deaths. Most cases have occurred in Saudi Arabia and the virus is thought to be primarily acquired through contact with camels.

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