

# German, 65, dies of complications from MERS infection: ministry

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A 65-year-old German man died this month after contracting MERS during a trip to Abu Dhabi, in the first death linked to the virus in Europe this year, authorities said Tuesday.

The man died in the western town of Ostercappeln on June 6 of an acute lung ailment that came as a complication from the MERS virus, the health ministry of Lower Saxony state said.

German authorities said they had no indication that the virus had spread and European health officials said the risk of an outbreak in Europe remained low.

It is believed the patient was infected with the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) during a visit to a livestock market in the United Arab Emirates, as camels are thought to carry the virus.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control in Stockholm said that the German case was the first MERS infection imported into the European Union so far this year, following one in the second half of 2014.

"The fact that this patient has now died does not change our risk assessment for Europe. The risk to the EU posed by the outbreak of MERS-CoV remains low," spokesman Romit Jain said.

"Although importation of MERS-CoV cases to the EU remains possible,

the risk of sustained human-to-human transmission in Europe remains very low."

Doctors determined in mid-May that the German patient was cured of the MERS infection and he was subsequently released from an isolation ward, the health ministry said in a statement.

"Any contagion with the MERS virus of people in contact with the patient was able to be prevented," it added.

Lower Saxony health minister Cornelia Rundt attributed this "great success" to precautions undertaken immediately after the patient's diagnosis.

"More than 200 people were subsequently tested for MERS and not a single person was found to have been infected," she said.

Rundt pointed to the spread of MERS in South Korea, which has seen 154 confirmed cases with 19 deaths in what has become the largest outbreak of the virus outside Saudi Arabia, as a cautionary tale.

"The example of South Korea tragically shows that such coordinated management of MERS cases is absolutely crucial," Rundt said.

Almost half of confirmed cases in South Korea have been traced to a single hospital, Seoul's Samsung Medical Centre.

In Saudi Arabia more than 950 people have been infected and 412 died from the disease.

There is no vaccine for MERS, which has a mortality rate of 35 percent, according to the World Health Organization.

Globally, some 1,200 people have been infected with MERS and some 450 have died since the virus first emerged in 2012.

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