

Saudi reports new MERS death, infections in Jeddah (Update)

April 16 2014

A Saudi man has died of MERS in the western city of Jeddah, where authorities have sought to calm fears over the spreading respiratory illness, the health ministry said Wednesday.

The ministry said five more people were infected with the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, including two medics, all in Jeddah.

The latest death of a 52-year-old brings to 71 the total number of people to have died from MERS, out of 205 infections in Saudi Arabia, it added.

Health authorities on Tuesday reported the death of a 59-year-old, also in Jeddah, as well as four other infections in the same city, including three medics.

Last week panic over the spread of MERS among medical staff in Jeddah forced the temporary closure of an emergency room at a major hospital, prompting Health Minister Abdullah al-Rabiah to visit the facility in a bid to calm the public.

"The situation concerning the coronavirus is reassuring," said a government statement.

Local media reported Wednesday at least four doctors at Jeddah's King Fahd hospital resigned this week after refusing to treat patients affected by MERS, apparently out of fear of catching the virus.

The MERS virus was initially concentrated in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia but has now spread across other areas.

The World Health Organisation said Friday it had been told of 212 laboratory-confirmed cases of MERS infection worldwide, of which 88 have proved fatal.

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

Experts are still struggling to understand MERS, for which there is no known vaccine.

A recent study said the virus has been "extraordinarily common" in camels for at least 20 years, and may have been passed directly from the animals to humans.

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