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Saudi reports 10 MERS deaths in a week

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Ten more people in Saudi Arabia have died from MERS over the past week, health ministry figures showed on Friday, after an international mission urged extra measures to combat the virus.

Saudi Arabia is the country worst-hit by Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV).

The latest deaths occurred between February 20 and 26, adding to a surge of cases which has killed 27 people since the start of the month.

Doctor Abdul Aziz bin Saeed, who heads the centre coordinating the ministry's response to MERS, warned in early February that a rise in cases typically occurs around this time of year, when there are more juvenile camels circulating.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has cited the preliminary results of studies indicating that people working with camels are at increased risk of infection from MERS-CoV, and young camels are particularly susceptible.

But representatives of the WHO and other UN agencies who concluded a visit to the kingdom this week said there was an urgent need for greater understanding of the "animal/human interface".

"There are so many aspects of the virus that are still unknown," said Berhe Tekola, of the Food and Agriculture Organization.

The mission urged "improving disease prevention, especially in health facilities that continue to experience avoidable infections".

Saudi Arabia has implemented a public education campaign about MERS but the statement said "efforts to educate professionals and the public are urgently needed."

According to health ministry figures, a total of 916 people have been infected with MERS since it was first identified in the kingdom in 2012. Of those, 392 have died.

More than 20 countries have been affected by the virus but most cases have been linked to the Middle East.

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