

Saudi says no MERS infections during Ramadan pilgrimage

13 August 2013

A large influx of Muslim pilgrims on Saudi Arabia during the fasting month of Ramadan passed without any cases of the MERS coronavirus infection reported, authorities said Tuesday.

"No infections by the MERS coronavirus or any other epidemic diseases" have been reported among "pilgrims and visitors in (the holy sites of) Mecca and Medina," Health Minister Abdullah al-Rabia said.

The numbers of pilgrims and visitors during Ramadan that began on July 10 and ended on Thursday five million, of whom only 200,000 remain in the kingdom, he said in a statement carried by the official SPA news agency.

The minor pilgrimage, or umrah, takes place all year round, but the busiest time is during Ramadan.

The virus has killed 46 of the 94 people confirmed infected since September worldwide, most of them in Saudi Arabia.

The exact origins of the virus is a riddle scientists have been working hard to solve in a bid to halt its spread, especially in the lead-up to the annual hajj pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia in October.

Concerns about the virus, for which there is no vaccine, have led Saudi Arabia to restrict visas for the 2013 hajj, which sees millions of Muslims flock to Mecca and Medina every year.

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

Like SARS, it is thought to have jumped from animals to humans, and shares the former's flu-like symptoms—but differs by causing [kidney failure](#).

On Friday, researchers pointed to the Arabian, or

dromedary, camel as a possible host of the virus.

Scientists studying the [new virus](#) have found older patients, men, and people with underlying medical conditions are those particularly at risk.

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