

UAE: Paramedic dies from MERS, others infected (Update)

April 9 2014, by Adam Schreck

A paramedic in the United Arab Emirates has died after contracting Middle East respiratory syndrome and five others have tested positive for the virus, the Gulf nation's interior ministry said Friday.

The death came as Jordanian health officials reported a new case of the disease, which is related to SARS, and three days after authorities in neighboring Saudi Arabia reported that 11 people, including health-care workers, had contracted the disease in the western city of Jiddah.

All six paramedics who contracted the virus in the UAE are Filipino nationals working for the Interior Ministry in the oasis city of Al Ain, according to a report by state news agency WAM quoting the ministry. It did not provide further details on their identities.

Al Ain is near the border of Oman and is about 160 kilometers (100 miles) inland from the UAE capital, Abu Dhabi. The UAE is a federation of seven emirates that includes Dubai.

The five infected paramedics have been placed under quarantine and people who have recently been treated by them are being checked for infection. The agency said the five were found to have contracted the virus during routine check-ups.

MERS belongs to a family of viruses known as coronaviruses that include both the common cold and SARS, which killed some 800 people in a global outbreak in 2003. It can cause fever, breathing problems,

pneumonia and kidney failure. It was first identified in 2012 in the Middle East, where most cases since have been diagnosed.

While MERS does not seem to spread as quickly between people as SARS did, it does appear to be more deadly. Recent studies suggest that camels are the main source of the disease, according to the World Health Organization.

The WHO says a total of 212 people have been confirmed to have contracted the disease since September 2012, and 88 of them have died.

Among those recently infected is a 52 year-old man in Jordan with underlying medical conditions who recently visited Saudi Arabia and is now hospitalized in stable condition, the WHO announced Friday.

Saudi Arabia is at the center of the MERS outbreak. It has recorded 66 deaths so far.

Health authorities in the kingdom earlier this week closed the emergency unit at one of the biggest hospitals in Jiddah for disinfection after 11 people in the city became infected, including two who later died. A nurse at the hospital was among those who fell ill.

Other Mideast countries that have reported cases of infection include Kuwait, Oman and Qatar. A small number of cases have been diagnosed in Europe and North Africa.

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