Foreigner dies of MERS in Saudi, 8 infected

13 April 2014

A foreigner has died from MERS while eight people including five health workers have been infected in the Saudi city of Jeddah, where the spread of the coronavirus among medics has sparked panic.

The death of the 45-year-old man, whose nationality has not been disclosed, brings the nationwide toll in the world's most-affected country to 68.

The health ministry late Saturday announced the death of the man and said five health workers—two women and three men—and three other people had been infected by the virus in Jeddah.

The announcement came days after panic over the spread of the virus among medical staff led to the closure of the emergency room at the city's main public hospital.

Health minister Abdullah al-Rabiah visited hospitals in Jeddah on Saturday in a bid to calm residents.

The total cases of infection by the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, which first appeared in the kingdom in September 2012, has hit 189, the ministry said.

The virus was initially concentrated in the eastern region but has now spread across more areas.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) said on Friday that 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 study has 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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