

Foreigner dies of MERS in Saudi Arabia (Update)

14 April 2014

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

The death of the 70-year-old man brought the toll of the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome in the most-affected country to 69 fatalities. Four new cases of infection were registered, bringing the kingdom's total to 194, the ministry said.

It did not disclose the man's nationality.

Last week panic over the spread of MERS among medical staff in Jeddah had caused a temporary closure of an emergency room at a main hospital, prompting a visit by Health Minister Abdullah al-Rabiah aimed at reassuring an anxious public.

Rabiah briefed the cabinet on Monday following his visit to hospitals in Jeddah over the weekend.

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

The [virus](#) was initially concentrated in the eastern region but has now spread across other areas.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) said 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 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.

But the Saudi [health](#) minister warned against assuming that camels were behind the virus, insisting in remarks published by Makkah daily on Monday that "one should not jump to conclusions."

"Saudi hospitals did not deal with a single case of infection that involved contact with the animal," he said.

His statement appeared in contrast with an announcement by his ministry on November 11, which said that a camel became the first animal to test positive in "preliminary laboratory checks."

The ministry said at the time that the camel was owned by a person diagnosed with the disease.

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