

Saudi MERS death toll rises to 66

7 April 2014

Saudi health authorities have reported the deaths of another two men from the MERS coronavirus, bringing the death toll from the respiratory disease in the worst hit country to 66.

A 70-year-old national, who died in the Red Sea port city of Jeddah, had also been suffering from chronic illnesses, the health ministry said in a late Sunday statement.

The second victim was a medic, also in Jeddah, where the ministry reported four new cases of the disease.

The latest deaths brought the total number of cases in Saudi Arabia to 167 people since Middle East Respiratory Syndrome first appeared in the kingdom in September 2012.

Experts are struggling to understand the disease, 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.

MERS 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.

The World Health Organisation said at the end of March that it has been told of 206 laboratory-confirmed cases of MERS infection, including 86 deaths.

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