**Novel Coronavirus: 5 Things To Know About the SARS-Like Infection**

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(Updated) On Tuesday, a 65-year-old French man died from a SARS-like infection, called novel coronavirus (nCoV). He was the first man in [France](http://topics.time.com/france/) to die from the infection, which he contracted after visiting Dubai. Meanwhile, health officials in [Saudi Arabia](http://topics.time.com/saudi-arabia/) — where the virus was first detected in April 2013 — reported five additional cases of the infection.

Novel coronavirus is among the family of coronaviruses that cause illnesses that range from the common cold to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Until last year, the new strain had never before been seen in humans. As of last week, the [WHO reported](http://www.who.int/csr/don/2013_05_23_ncov/en/index.html) that there have been a total of 49 people infected since September 2012, 27 of whom have died.

“We do not know where the virus hides in nature. We do not know how people are getting infected. Until we answer these questions, we are empty-handed when it comes to prevention. These are alarm bells. And we must respond,” said Margaret Chan, the director-general of the World Health Organization [at the 66th World Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland](http://www.cnn.com/2013/05/28/health/france-coronavirus-death/index.html?hpt=hp_t1).

Just how widespread the virus is remains unknown, but the WHO urges member states to share any information about the infection, in order to coordinate effective public health responses. Here is what you should know:

**1. nCoV can be spread from person to person**

The WHO has not yet determined exactly how the virus spreads from person to person, but the organization reports that there have been several clusters of cases in which human-to-human transmission has been confirmed. Transmission could be through coughing and sneezing or exposure to a contaminated environment.  People with daily, sustained contact with infected persons are at risk, and there have been cases of the infection spreading from patients to [health care](http://topics.time.com/health-care/) workers. However, whether or not casual contact puts a person at risk for infection is not confirmed.

**2. It’s less transmissible than SARS**

The WHO says SARS, a type of coronavirus detected in 2003, is distantly related to nCoV. As part of the same virus family, both infections can cause severe symptoms, but SARS was also characterized by muscle aches and chills. The major difference between the two is that nCoV does not pass from person to person as easily as the SARS virus did.

**3. It comes from the Middle East**

The virus started in 2012 in Jordan, and has since spread to several other countries in the Middle East including Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Travelers to the Middle East have brought the infection to other countries including Tunisia, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. There has been very little transmission of the infection between individuals who did not visit the Middle East but interacted with sick travelers when they returned.

**4. Symptoms are primarily characterized as respiratory illness**

Symptoms of the infection include serious respiratory illness often with additional fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. Currently there is no cure nor a vaccine for the infections, so physicians treat patients based on their symptoms. Some patients come down with a bad case of pneumonia or kidney failure. Gastrointestinal problems, like diarrhea, have also been reported.

People who already have underlying health conditions may be more susceptible to the infection, and their symptoms may be different from  the majority of cases — for example, they may not experience respiratory problems.

**5. There are no travel restrictions related to the virus**

The WHO has not made any travel or trade restrictions for countries with reported infections. When traveling, it’s important to avoid close contact with individuals who show symptoms of the illness. It’s also advisable to avoid consuming uncooked or undercooked meats, unwashed fruits and veggies and drinking beverages with any unsterilized water.