

CDC to monitor novel coronavirus

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The novel coronavirus or NCoV, the tentative name given to a new strain of coronavirus which was first reported in the Middle East last year, may be becoming more easily transmitted between humans and doctors should be on their guard, the Department of Health said yesterday.

First discovered in a Qatari patient in Saudi Arabia last year, NCoV is a strain of virus similar to that which caused the SARS outbreak in 2003.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) said the NCoV is a respiratory tract infection and has a latency period of between seven and 10 days, and causes certain SARS-like symptoms, while some cases may be accompanied by renal failure.

The virus can be lethal, the CDC said, adding that of the 11 confirmed cases of human infection with novel NCoV, there have been five deaths since April last year.

The NCoV had at first been seen as having a limited probability of transmission between people, but on Wednesday the WHO issued the following update: "Although this case is suggestive of person-to-person transmission, on the basis of current evidence, the risk of sustained person-to-person transmission appears to be very low."

The update followed a UK report of two citizens infected with the virus on Monday, with one of them having visited Pakistan prior to infection and displaying symptoms while in Saudi Arabia.

The patient has been confirmed as being infected with NCoV as well as with H1N1 influenza — also known as swine flu — and is the 10th reported case of the NCoV infection, the CDC said.

The CDC said the second patient is a relative of the patient in the 10th case and has no recent travel history, but had been in close contact with the other patient.

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While these two cases may suggest person-to-person transmission of the virus, there have been no further cases corroborating such a view, the CDC said, adding that it would continue to monitor international news for further developments regarding the virus.

The CDC also added a call for travelers, especially those bound for or returning from the Middle East, to be careful and pay special attention to personal hygiene and sanitation, adding that those who feel unwell should inform CDC personnel at airports.

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