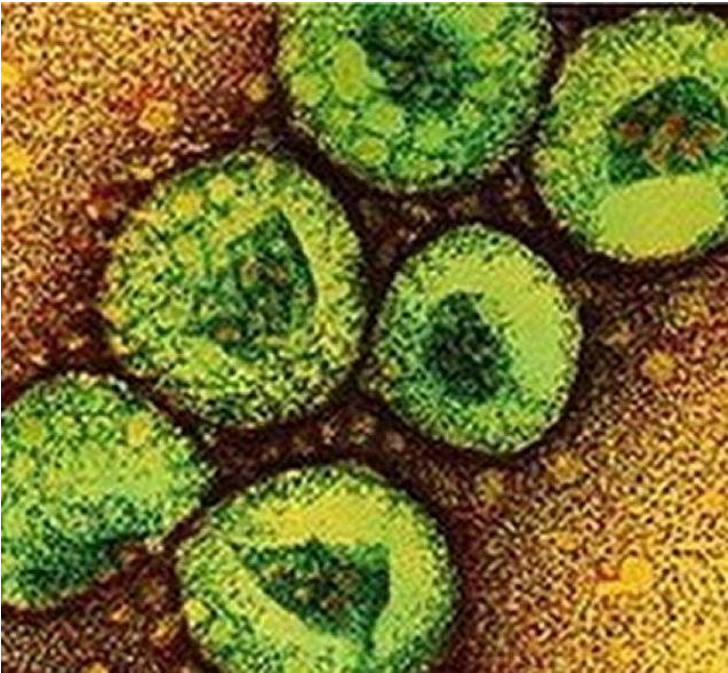


WHO: Coronavirus MERS can be a global killer

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Singapore: First identified in September 2012, novel coronavirus MERS, the virus detected in the middle east has now been labeled as a threat to the entire world by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The called MERS has so far killed 27 people out of the 49 it infected since it was detected.

Experts have said that this deadly new strain is a SARS-like virus that had killed about 800 people in 2003.

After another 65-year-old man died in France in France, health officials warned that the MERS-CoV virus has become a global threat.

"We understand too little about this virus when viewed against the magnitude of its potential threat," said Dr Margaret Chan, Head of the WHO said on Monday in a speech in Geneva.

The virus is believed to transmit mainly from person-to-person contact, however, authorities are trying to understand why it has not spread easily among larger communities. "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," Dr Chan added.

So far nine countries worldwide have reported cases of this virus. While Saudi Arabia has reported the highest number of cases, at 33, the virus has spread to Qatar, Jordan, Pakistan and Tunisia. Some cases have also been identified in Germany and Britain. WHO authorities believe that the initial transmission of the virus was from animal to human but have yet to identify the animal sources.