

TARIKH	22 / 04 / 2014	SECTION	WORLD
MUKA SURAT	25	RUANGAN	

20 new MERS cases confirmed

SURGE: Saudi govt not imposing travel restrictions yet

RIYADH

SAUDI Arabia has confirmed 20 new cases of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) on Saturday and Sunday, adding up to 49 infections in six days, a sudden increase of a disease that kills a third of the people infected and has no cure.

MERS, a SARS-like novel coronavirus that emerged in Saudi Arabia two years ago, had infected 244 people in the kingdom, of whom 76 died, said the Health Ministry on its website.

However, Health Minister Abdullah al-Rabia on Sunday said there was no scientific evidence yet to justify ordering additional preventative measures such as travel restrictions.

He said he did not know why there had been a surge of cases in Jeddah, adding that it might be a seasonal pattern as there had been a rise in infections in April and May last year.

Another cluster of cases had been detected in the United Arab Emirates, and a Malaysian who was recently in the Gulf had

been confirmed as being infected, said Kuala Lumpur.

MERS has no vaccine or anti-viral treatment, but international and Saudi health authorities say the disease, which originated in camels, does not transmit easily between people and may simply die out. But, health experts have warned that MERS had the potential to eventually mutate.

The number of officially confirmed Saudi cases has jumped over the past two weeks. The authorities last week issued statements aimed at reassuring the public that there was no immediate cause for concern and that the latest outbreak had not met international definitions of an epidemic.

Al-Rabia said the ministry had invited five European and North American companies to work with it in developing a vaccine and some of the companies would soon visit the kingdom.

Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam, is expected to receive a surge of pilgrims in July during the faith's annual fasting month of Ramadan, followed by millions more in early October for the haj. Reuters