

In the news

NEW CORONAVIRUS

A new virus of the family *Coronaviridae* has been identified. The virus, which has yet to be named, causes acute respiratory illness and renal failure.

Two infected individuals have been reported, with the first, a 60-year-old man from Saudi Arabia, dying from the infection. The second individual, a 49-year-old Qatari man who had recently travelled to Saudi Arabia, was transferred to a London hospital. Viral genome analysis revealed that the viruses from these patients are 99.5% identical.

Coronaviruses include pathogens that cause diseases with a significant range of clinical severity, from the common cold to severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS; which caused a worldwide epidemic in 2002 and 2003). However, both the WHO and the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) believe that the new virus is different from SARS coronavirus. Similarly, virologist John Oxford (Queen Mary, University of London, UK) commented that “SARS was very quick off the mark infecting hospital staff etc and this new virus does not ... appear to be in the same ‘big bang’ group.” (*BBC News*, 24 Sep 2012.)

Nevertheless, given the severity of the two cases, the WHO and several experts around the world are carrying out extensive tests to characterize the virus and advise countries on appropriate health protection measures. They have found that the virus “cannot be easily transmitted from person to person” (*Reuters*, 28 Sep 2012). Moreover, writing in *Eurosurveillance*, scientists at the ECDC stated that the virus is “probably of zoonotic origin” (27 Sep 2012).

Virologist Ron Fouchier (Erasmus MC, Rotterdam, the Netherlands), who isolated the virus from the 60-year-old man, has also cautioned that we need to “fulfill Koch’s postulates” and actually show that the virus caused the disease by testing its virulence in animals (*Science*, 24 Sep 2012).

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