

Patient dies from novel coronavirus in UK

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A patient with the novel coronavirus has died at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham.

The patient—who died on 17 February—was believed to belong to a family being treated for the condition in a Manchester hospital. Three cases in the United Kingdom have now occurred within the same family cluster, providing evidence of person to person transmission.¹

The hospital disclosed that the patient who died was already an outpatient undergoing treatment for a long term, complex unrelated health condition, and was immunocompromised.

There have now been 12 confirmed cases of the coronavirus worldwide, four of which have been in the UK. In total, six patients have now died, one in the UK, three in Saudi Arabia, and two in Jordan. The Health Protection Agency said that the risk of transmission still remained low.

In the UK, the first member of the family cluster to fall ill had travelled to the Middle East and Pakistan. The other two family members had no recent travel history, indicating that the infection was acquired in the UK. The third family member infected was understood to be recovering from mild respiratory illness and was currently well. The Health Protection Agency said it was following up other household members and contacts of the patient.

Coronaviruses are causes of the common cold but can also include more severe illness such as severe acute respiratory syndrome. The new coronavirus was first identified in September 2012, in a patient who died from a severe respiratory infection in June 2012.

Professor John Watson, head of the respiratory diseases department at the Health Protection Agency, said: “Although

this case appears to be due to person to person transmission, the risk of infection in contacts in most circumstances is still considered to be low. If novel coronaviruses were more infectious, we would have expected to have seen a larger number of cases than we have seen since the first case was reported three months ago.”

The HPA recommends strict measures for infection control, including isolation of affected patients, barrier nursing, and ensuring that all staff members wear appropriate protective equipment such as masks, gowns, and gloves.²

Watson said: “We would like to emphasise that the risk associated with novel coronavirus to the general UK population remains very low. The Health Protection Agency will continue to work closely with national and international health authorities and will share any further advice with health professionals and the public if, and when, more information becomes available.”

The World Health Organization said that all member states should continue their surveillance for severe acute infections and carefully review any unusual patterns. Any patients with unexplained respiratory illness that is severe, progressive, or complicated and that does not respond to treatment should be tested for coronavirus. In addition, any clusters of severe acute respiratory infections or any such infections in healthcare workers should be thoroughly investigated regardless of where in the world they occur.

1 Wise J. Two more cases of novel coronavirus are confirmed in UK. *BMJ* 2013;346:f1030.

2 Health Protection Agency. Infection control advice: novel coronavirus cases. 2012. www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1317136232722.

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