

## **UAE bans fruits from Kerala after Nipah virus outbreak**

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**Dubai/Mumbai:** The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has banned imports of fresh vegetables and fruits from the southern Indian state of Kerala where 13 people have died due to an outbreak of the rare brain-damaging Nipah virus, the Gulf state said on Tuesday.

The UAE's Ministry of Climate Change and Environment also notified other local authorities, including the Abu Dhabi Food Control Authority and the municipalities of its emirates, to prevent the entry of any fresh produce from Kerala, it said in a statement.

The ministry suspects that fruit bats are the source of the virus. It said it was banning fresh produce, including mangoes, dates and bananas – the bats' preferred fruits.

Indian health officials have not been able to trace the origin of the Nipah outbreak and have begun a fresh round of tests on fruit bats from Perambra, the suspected epicenter of the infection.

Kerala has sent 116 suspected cases for testing in recent weeks, 15 have been confirmed with the deadly disease and 13 of these people have died, with two patients still undergoing treatment.

No confirmed cases of the virus have been found outside the state.

There is no vaccine for the virus, which is spread through body fluids and can cause encephalitis, or inflammation of the brain, the World Health Organization (WHO) says.

Last week, the UAE consulate in Kerala advised travelers to take precautions and follow safety instructions issued by the Indian authorities.

The Gulf state has also banned imports of live animals from South Africa, based on a notification from the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) of the registration of Rift Valley Fever disease, the ministry said.

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