

# **MIDDLE EASTERN RESPIRATORY SYNDROME**

## **Introduction**

Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) is a serious viral illness that originated in and around the Arabian Peninsula. This infection has been identified in 17 countries throughout the world. Although the risk of contracting MERS is very low it can cause serious illness and death. We want you to be informed about this virus, the risk of becoming infected and the symptoms that are usually experienced. Please review the attached FAQ's to be informed about how to protect your health and the health of our community.

## **MERS Frequently Asked Questions and Answers**

### **What is MERS?**

MERS, or Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, is an illness caused by a virus called a coronavirus. It is also sometimes referred to as MERS-CoV, for Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus.

### **What is the source of MERS?**

In addition to humans, MERS has been found in camels in Qatar, Oman, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and a bat in Saudi Arabia.

### **Where have cases of MERS occurred?**

MERS cases have occurred in 17 countries around the world. The majority of reported cases to date have been in countries in or near the Arabian Peninsula: Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Yemen.

### **How is MERS spread?**

MERS is spread from ill people to others through close contact, such as caring for or living in close quarters, such as a dorm room or an apartment with an infected person. The virus does not appear to spread easily among people in public settings such as a shopping mall, an elevator, a classroom or a dorm hallway.

### **What is the incubation period of MERS?**

The incubation period for MERS (time between when a person is exposed to MERS and when they start to have symptoms) is 2-14 days.

### **What are the symptoms of MERS?**

This is primarily a respiratory illness so fever (> 38 degrees centigrade or 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit) cough and shortness of breath are the most common symptoms. Other less common symptoms may include: sore throat, headache, body aches, nausea/vomiting, diarrhea and/or abdominal pain.

**Who should be concerned about having MERS?**

Anyone with these symptoms who has traveled from a country in or near the Arabian Peninsula within the previous 14 days. Additionally, those individuals who experience symptoms after being in close contact with an ill person (fever, cough, shortness of breath) AND who has traveled from a country in or near the Arabian Peninsula within the previous 14 days.

**What should I do if I may have MERS?**

If you develop fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as cough or shortness of breath, you should call ahead to a healthcare provider and mention your recent travel to countries in and around the Arabian Peninsula. Follow instructions given to you by your provider. While sick, stay home from work or school and delay future travel to reduce the possibility of spreading illness to others.

**Who is at higher risk for MERS?**

People with diabetes; chronic lung, heart and kidney disease; weakened immune systems due to cancer, HIV, etc.

**What is the treatment for MERS?**

There is no vaccine or cure for MERS, but health care professionals can treat a patient's symptoms and provide supportive care. Hospitalization is often required.

**How can I reduce my risk of getting MERS?**

The best way is to avoid contact with persons ill with fever and cough. Hand washing with soap and water or using hand sanitizer is helpful. Cover your cough and sneeze. Avoid touching your face and mouth with unwashed hands. Disinfect frequently touched surfaces.

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