

MIDDLE EAST RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (MERS-CoV) **FACT SHEET**

What is Middle East Respiratory Syndrome?

Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) is a viral respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus — the same family of viruses that causes the common cold — called MERS-CoV. MERS-CoV was first reported in Saudi Arabia in 2012. Since then, it's been reported in other countries in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, Asia and the United States. Most cases outside of the Middle East have been reported by people who recently traveled there.

How is MERS-CoV spread?

MERS-CoV, like other coronaviruses, is thought to spread from an infected person's respiratory secretions, such as through coughing. However, the exact ways the virus spreads are not currently well understood.

MERS-CoV has spread from ill people to others through close contact, such as caring for or living with an infected person. Infected people have spread MERS-CoV to others in healthcare settings, such as hospitals. Researchers studying MERS have not seen any ongoing spreading of MERS-CoV in the community.

What are the signs and symptoms of MERS-CoV?

MERS-CoV infection causes fever, coughing and shortness of breath. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Pneumonia is common, and sometimes it may cause injury to organs, such as the kidneys. Some people only have mild symptoms.

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

The incubation period for MERS (time between when a person is exposed to MERS-CoV and when they start to have symptoms) is usually about 5 or 6 days, but can range from 2-14 days.

Who is most at risk?

- Travelers to countries in or near the Arabian Peninsula
- Close contacts of an ill traveler from countries in or near the Arabian Peninsula
- People recently in a healthcare facility in the Republic of Korea
- Close contacts of a confirmed case of MERS
- Healthcare personnel not using recommended infection control precautions
- People with exposure to camels

What type of health problems are caused by MERS-CoV?

For many people with MERS, more severe complications followed, such as pneumonia and kidney failure. About 3-4 out of every 10 people reported with MERS have died. Most of the people who died had an underlying medical condition.

How is MERS-CoV diagnosed?

MERS-CoV infection is diagnosed by getting samples from the blood, stool or respiratory secretions.

How is MERS-CoV treated?

Currently, there is no vaccine to prevent MERS-CoV infection. The U.S. National Institutes of Health is exploring the possibility of developing one.

How can MERS-CoV be prevented?

You can help protect yourself from respiratory illnesses by taking everyday preventive actions:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds, and help young children do the same.

- If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid personal contact, such as kissing or sharing cups or eating utensils, with sick people.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects, such as doorknobs.
- If you are caring for or living with a person confirmed to have, or being evaluated for, MERS-CoV infection, see Interim Guidance for Preventing MERS-CoV from Spreading in Homes and Communities.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)

