

Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) - Factsheet

Outbreak of MERS-CoV in the Republic of Korea

The WHO reported 186 cases including 36 deaths in the outbreak in the Republic of Korea (South Korea) in 2015. The Ministry of Health and Welfare of the RoK declared that transmission of MERS-CoV in South Korea ended on 23 December 2015. The last MERS patient in the country was a 35 year old male who passed away on 25 November 2015 due to complications of an underlying disease.

MERS-CoV is a serious disease that was first identified in September 2012 that results in death in some people. Most deaths have occurred in people with underlying illnesses that may make them more likely to get respiratory infections.

Other Coronaviruses that are like MERS-CoV cause the common cold and SARS. All people who have had MERS-CoV have had a history of living in or travel to the Middle East (mostly Saudi Arabia), contact with travellers returning from these areas, or can be linked to an imported case..

There have been no people with MERS-CoV in Australia.

Symptoms

- Most people become unwell quickly, with fever, cough, shortness of breath, leading to pneumonia.
- Other symptoms include muscle pain, diarrhoea, vomiting and nausea.

There have been people with mild symptoms and some have caught the virus but have no symptoms. **How it spreads**

- It is not yet understood how people are getting this disease.
- Some people in the Middle East appear to have got the disease from infected camels and bats. How this occurred is not well understood.
- It appears to spread from an infected person to another person in close contact. The virus does not appear to spread easily from person-to-person and appears to spread only from people who are sick.

People at risk

People living in or travelling to the Middle East or other affected areas or who have had contact with other people with MERS-CoV may be at risk of getting the disease.

People with underlying illnesses that make them more vulnerable to respiratory disease may be at a higher risk.

Preventing infection

Regular handwashing can help stop MERS-CoV from spreading. Use a hand sanitiser if soap and water is not available.

If you are around someone who is unwell you should wash your hands often and avoid touching your face. Ask the person to cough or sneeze into their elbow or tissue.

People travelling to the Middle East who have underlying illnesses should avoid visiting farms and markets where camels might be present. People who are travelling

to the Middle East should wash their hands often, before eating, and after touching animals.

There is no vaccine for MERS-CoV.

How it is diagnosed

A laboratory test on fluid collected from the back of the throat or the lungs can diagnose MERS-CoV.

How it is treated

At the moment there is no specific treatment for MERS-CoV but early medical care can save lives.

How health authorities will prevent its spread in Australia

The World Health Organization (WHO) is working with countries that have had people with MERS-CoV to try and stop it spreading and to find out more about the disease.

There have been no people with MERS-CoV in Australia. Doctors and hospitals in Australia are ready to look after a person with MERS-CoV.

Procedures to stop MERS-CoV spreading would include:

- Asking a sick person to wear a mask over their mouth and be in a room by themselves.
- Laboratory and healthcare workers seeing patients or handling specimens would follow special safety guidelines
- Health departments would be told that there is a person with MERS-CoV.
- Health departments would follow up people who had been in close contact with that person so they can be given information and be tested if necessary.

What should a person do if they become unwell

If you become unwell whilst travelling in the Middle East, you should not wait until you arrive back in Australia. See a doctor or go to the local emergency department.

If you have returned from the Middle East within the last 14 days or have had contact with someone who may have had MERS-CoV and get a fever, cough, shortness of breath or are worried you should see your doctor or go to the emergency department. It is important that you tell the receptionist or nurse that you have visited the Middle East or have had contact with someone who may have had MERS-CoV when you arrive.

You may be asked to wear a mask over your mouth and be placed in a separate room by yourself to stop others from becoming unwell.

Further information

World Health Organization Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus updates available from the WHO website:

[\(http://www.who.int/csr/disease/coronavirus_infections/en/\)](http://www.who.int/csr/disease/coronavirus_infections/en/)

[Department of Health website](http://health.gov.au/MERS-coronavirus) (<http://health.gov.au/MERS-coronavirus>)

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