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AN INITIATIVE OF THE
AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Middle East respiratory syndrome: Get the facts on MERS

Middle East respiratory syndrome, also known as MERS, is a respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus. (A coronavirus is a common type of virus that most people have some time during their lives.)

The first case of MERS was reported in Saudi Arabia in 2012. The disease has since been reported in other countries.

Because of its seriousness and the possibility of its spread, health officials around the globe are keeping a close watch on the disease.



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What are the symptoms of MERS?

MERS is a severe illness. The symptoms are usually respiratory illness with fever, cough and shortness of breath. Diarrhea is also common. The disease can often be fatal.

How is MERS spread?

MERS can spread from person-to-person when people are in close contact, such as among families or co-workers. Health care workers have also been infected by patients.

It's not yet known for sure how MERS is spread between people. However, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, coronaviruses in general are thought to be spread through the air by coughing and sneezing and through close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands.



Photo courtesy iStockphoto

Is there a vaccine for MERS? How is it treated?

Currently, there is no vaccine for MERS. Unfortunately, there is also no specific treatment. Medical care is usually used to relieve symptoms.

How can I protect myself from MERS?

CDC advises people to follow these tips to help prevent respiratory illnesses:

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer that is at least 60 percent alcohol.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and dispose of the tissue.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact, such as kissing or sharing dishware, with sick people.
- Clean and disinfect frequently used surfaces, such as doorknobs and toys.



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If I have symptoms, should I see a doctor?

CDC recommends that you see a doctor if you develop a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as cough or shortness of breath, within 14 days after traveling from countries that are suspected to have MERS cases. Be sure to tell your health care provider about your recent travel.

Where can I get more information on MERS?

CDC and the World Health Organization offer information on MERS, including travel information and updated case information. Visit www.cdc.gov and www.who.int.