

MIDDLE EAST RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (MERS) FACT SHEET

What is MERS?

MERS is a respiratory illness caused by a virus known as the MERS Coronavirus. MERS was first reported in Saudi Arabia in 2012.

Who can get MERS?

Anyone. However, people who have recently traveled to the Arabian Peninsula may be at increased risk. All cases of MERS so far have been linked to persons who traveled to countries in and near the Arabian Peninsula. Countries considered in and near the Arabian Peninsula include Bahrain, Iraq, Iran, Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. It not recommended that anyone change their travel plans because of MERS. The following groups may also be at increased risk:

- Persons who have had close contact, such as caring for or living with
 - an ill traveler who recently traveled from the Arabian Peninsula; and
 - a person confirmed to have MERS.
- Health care personnel who did not use recommended infection control precautions while in close contact with a confirmed case of MERS while the person had symptoms
- Persons who have had contact with camels

If you think you may have MERS, call your health care provider **before** your visit to tell them about your symptoms.

How does MERS spread?

MERS is thought to spread through an infected person's respiratory secretions, such as through coughing. However, the exact ways the virus spreads are not well understood at this time.

What are the symptoms of MERS?

Most people experience severe acute respiratory illness along with symptoms such as fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Some people also have gastrointestinal symptoms including diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting. The virus appears to cause more severe disease in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with chronic diseases such as diabetes, cancer, and chronic lung disease.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually begin 5–6 days after a person is exposed to the virus, but it can range from 2–14 days.

Is there a vaccine for MERS?

No, currently there is no vaccine for MERS.

How is MERS treated?

There is no specific treatment for the virus. Treatment is supportive and based on a person's clinical condition.

How can a person protect themselves against MERS?

To protect against MERS, you can do the following: 1) wash your hands frequently with soap and water, scrubbing your hands for at least 20 seconds, 2) cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, 3) avoid close contact with sick people, such as kissing, or sharing cups or eating utensils, 4) clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects, such as toys, doorknobs, tables, and counters, and 5) avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.

Where can I get more information?

Information about MERS and other related health topics can be found at www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit www.doh.dc.gov or call (202) 442-9371.