

Mississippi State Department of Health Office of Epidemiology MERS-CoV Frequently Asked Questions

5/28/14

What is MERS-CoV?

MERS, or “Middle East Respiratory Syndrome”, is a viral respiratory illness. MERS is caused by a coronavirus called “Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus” (MERS-CoV). It was first reported in 2012 in Saudi Arabia.

What are the symptoms of MERS?

Most people who become infected with MERS-CoV develop a severe acute respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough and shortness of breath. **30% of them died.** Some people were reported as having only a mild respiratory illness.

Does MERS-CoV spread person to person?

Yes, MERS-CoV spreads between people with close contact, especially from infected patients to healthcare providers. It is currently unknown how contagious MERS-CoV may be.

Close contact is defined as a) any person who provided care for the patient, including a healthcare worker or family member, or had similarly close physical contact; or b) any person who stayed at the same place (e.g. lived with, visited) as the patient while the patient was ill.

Where are infections with MERS-CoV occurring?

The majority of the cases have occurred in the Arabian Peninsula and include the following countries:

Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Oman, Jordan, Kuwait, and Yemen.

Other countries have had travel-associated cases and include: **United Kingdom, France, Tunisia, Italy, Malaysia, Turkey, Greece, Egypt, the US and the Netherlands.**

Who is at risk for infection?

People who are recent travelers from the Arabian Peninsula, close contacts of ill travelers from the Arabian Peninsula, and close contacts to someone with confirmed or probable MERS.

Are there cases in the U.S.?

Yes. There have been two cases identified in May 2014 in travelers to the U.S. from Saudi Arabia. CDC continues to investigate to determine whether spread of infection to others has occurred.

Am I at risk for MERS-CoV infection in the United States?

The MERS situation in the U.S. represents a very low risk to the general public in this country.

What are the concerns?

Most people who have had confirmed infection so far have had a severe acute respiratory illness and 30% have died. Spread is from person to person, usually after close and prolonged contact such as caring for or living with an infected person. There is a potential for the virus to spread globally and there have been travel-associated cases identified in a number of countries, including the U.S.

Have any Mississippi residents been affected?

No, to date there have not been any reports of Mississippi residents who are infected with or who have been in contact with an infected individual.

People are not considered to be at risk for infection unless they have close contact with someone who potentially has MERS-CoV.

I am traveling out of the country. Do I need to be concerned about MERS-CoV?

If you are traveling to countries in or near the Arabian Peninsula, CDC recommends that you pay attention to your health during and after your trip. You should call a doctor right away if you develop fever and symptoms of lower respiratory illness, such as cough or shortness of breath, within 14 days after traveling from countries in or near the Arabian Peninsula. Tell the doctor about your recent travel. See CDC travel information at <http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/mers/travel.html>

What if I recently traveled to countries in the Arabian Peninsula or neighboring countries and got sick?

If you develop a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as cough or shortness of breath, within 14 days after traveling from countries in the Arabian Peninsula or neighboring countries, you should see your healthcare provider and mention your recent travel.

Is there a vaccine?

No, but CDC is discussing with partners the possibility of developing one.

What are the treatments?

There are no specific treatments recommended for illnesses caused by MERS-CoV. Medical care is supportive and to help relieve symptoms.

What is the Mississippi State Department of Health doing?

MSDH continues to monitor the situation and is receiving frequent updates from the CDC. MSDH is keeping healthcare providers and laboratories updated regarding the risks of illness, infection control guidelines, providing laboratory support and identifying ill individuals who may be infected with MERS-CoV.

Is there a laboratory test available?

Yes, the lab test is a PCR test done on a respiratory samples and serum. The Mississippi Public Health Lab (PHL) performs this testing. Instructions for the submission and testing of samples are available on the MSDH website at HealthyMS.com/MERS.

Who should be considered for evaluation for MERS-CoV infection?

Healthcare professionals should evaluate patients who meet the following criteria for MERS-CoV infection:

- A. Fever and pneumonia or acute respiratory distress syndrome (based on clinical or radiologic evidence) AND EITHER:
 - o history of travel from countries in or near the Arabian Peninsula within 14 days before symptom onset OR
 - o close contact with a symptomatic traveler who developed fever and acute respiratory illness (not necessarily pneumonia) within 14 days after traveling from countries in or near the Arabian Peninsula) OR
 - o is a member of a cluster of patients with severe acute respiratory illness (e.g., fever and pneumonia requiring hospitalization) of unknown etiology in which MERS-CoV is being evaluated in consultation with state or local health department (more details below).

OR

- B. Close contact of a confirmed or probable case of MERS.

Can MSDH test for MERS-CoV infection?

Yes, the Mississippi Public Health Lab (PHL) has the capacity to test multiple specimen types for MERS-CoV infection. The Specimen Submission Guidelines are available on the MSDH website at HealthyMS.com/MERS. **Providers should contact the MSDH Office of Epidemiology for prior approval for testing at 601-576-7725 or after hours at 601-576-7400.**

Where can I find further information?

The CDC MERS website, available at <http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/mers/index.html>