

NSA - Security / Health Update - MERS virus - Middle East



The Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) is a viral respiratory illness first reported in Saudi Arabia in 2012. It is caused by a coronavirus called MERS-CoV. The symptoms include shortness of breath, coughing and fever. Timely diagnosis of the virus and general treatment can be life-saving, there is a 30% mortality.

The source of the virus is unknown but it is believed to come from an animal source. In addition to humans, MERS-CoV has been found in camels in Qatar, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and a bat in Saudi Arabia. Camels in a few other countries have also tested positive for antibodies to MERS-CoV, indicating

they were previously infected with MERS-CoV or a closely related virus.

3 days ago, the first MERS case was confirmed in The US. A man traveling from Riyadh to Chicago was diagnosed with the virus and the CDC has stepped up its travel advice to the region to level 2. This means that disease prevention protection should be enhanced.

The Centre for disease control and prevention (CDC) has set up a number of useful guiding points for travelers to the region to help prevent the spread of the virus:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- Be sure you are up-to-date with all of your shots, and if possible, see your health care provider at least 4–6 weeks before travel to get any additional shots.

If you fall sick:

- Cover your mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and throw the tissue in the trash.
- Avoid contact with other people to keep from infecting them.
- See a doctor if you develop a 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 your doctor about your recent travels.

The Norwegian Institute for Public Health also recommends avoiding contact with animals and animal waste products.

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