



## MIDDLE EAST RESPIRATORY SYNDROME CORONAVIRUS (MERS-CoV)

### **What is Middle East Respiratory Syndrome?**

Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) is a respiratory illness. It is caused by a coronavirus called MERS-CoV. MERS cases are very rare in the United States. These cases are travel-associated, typically in people returning from the Arabian Peninsula.

### **Who gets MERS-CoV?**

People with MERS have traveled to or lived in the Arabian Peninsula or had close contact with an ill person who recently traveled to the Arabian Peninsula.

Only two people with MERS have ever been identified in the United States. Both lived and worked in Saudi Arabia where they likely became infected. Some people with MERS might become infected after having contact with infected camels. People providing care to a person with MERS can also become infected if they do not follow infection control recommendations.

### **How is MERS-CoV spread?**

MERS-CoV, like other coronaviruses, likely spreads from an infected person's respiratory secretions, such as through coughing. However, the precise ways that it spreads is not fully understood.

MERS-CoV has spread from ill people to others through close contact, such as caring for or living with an infected person. Infected people have spread MERS-CoV to others in health care settings, such as hospitals. Researchers studying MERS have not seen any ongoing spreading of MERS-CoV in the community.

All reported cases have been linked to countries in and near the Arabian Peninsula.

### **What are the symptoms of MERS-CoV?**

Most people confirmed to have MERS-CoV infection have had severe respiratory illness with symptoms of fever (temperature of 100.4 degrees F (38 degrees C) or greater), cough, and shortness of breath. Some people also had diarrhea, nausea and vomiting. For many people with MERS, more severe complications followed, such as pneumonia and kidney failure.



# Frequently Asked Questions

About 35 percent of people with MERS die. Most of the people who died had a pre-existing medical condition that weakened their immune system, or an underlying medical condition that had not yet been discovered. Medical conditions sometimes weaken people's immune systems and make them more likely to get sick or have severe illness.

## **How soon do symptoms appear?**

The symptoms of MERS start to appear about five or six days after a person is exposed but can range from two to 14 days.

## **Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?**

Yes, MERS-CoV has spread from ill people to others through close contact, such as caring for or living with an infected person.

## **What is the treatment for MERS-CoV?**

There is no specific antiviral treatment recommended for MERS-CoV infection. Individuals with MERS often receive medical care to help relieve symptoms. For severe cases, current treatment includes care to support vital organ functions.

## **What can a person or community do to prevent the spread of MERS-CoV?**

There is currently no vaccine to protect people against MERS, but scientists are working to develop one.

Reduce the risk of getting respiratory illnesses by:

- Washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, and help young children do the same. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- When coughing or sneezing, cover the nose and mouth with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid personal contact, such as kissing, or sharing cups or eating utensils, with sick people.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects, such as doorknobs.

## **Resources**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/mers/risk.html>

**Office of Infectious Disease Epidemiology**  
**24/7 Emergency Contact Number: 1-888-295-5156**

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