



<b>DATE:</b>	08/15/2018
<b>TO:</b>	Health Alert Network
<b>FROM:</b>	Dr. Rachel Levine, Secretary of Health
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Evaluation of Returning Travelers for Severe Acute Respiratory Illness Caused by the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV)
<b>DISTRIBUTION:</b>	Statewide
<b>LOCATION:</b>	Statewide
<b>STREET ADDRESS:</b>	Statewide
<b>COUNTY:</b>	Statewide
<b>MUNICIPALITY:</b>	Statewide
<b>ZIP CODE:</b>	Statewide

**This transmission is a “Health Advisory”:** provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

**HOSPITALS:** PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, PEDIATRIC, INFECTION CONTROL, NURSING, AND LABORATORY STAFF IN YOUR HOSPITAL

**EMS COUNCILS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE

**FQHCs:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE

**LOCAL HEALTH JURISDICTIONS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE

**PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP

### **Background**

The Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) can cause a severe acute respiratory illness with fever, cough and shortness of breath. Additional clinical features may include diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, renal failure, coagulopathy or pericarditis. At the end of June 2018, a total of 2,229 laboratory-confirmed cases of MERS-CoV infections were reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) from 27 countries, including two cases reported from the United States. All reported cases have been traceable to the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>1</sup> Clusters of illness reported to the WHO from several countries provide clear evidence of human-to-human transmission of MERS-CoV. Most of these clusters were in healthcare personnel who acquired the infection while caring for patients with confirmed MERS-CoV infection.

Travel to and from the Arabian Peninsula<sup>1</sup> is expected to increase in the coming weeks due to the Hajj. This annual religious pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia will occur from August 19 to August 24, 2018. Over 2 million Muslims, including over 10,000 Americans, make the pilgrimage

each year. Providers are reminded to consider MERS-CoV when evaluating patients who present with acute respiratory infection (fever and cough) with a recent history of travel to the Arabian peninsula, or exposure to a recent symptomatic traveler.

### **Clinical Recommendations**

Obtain a thorough travel history from all patients presenting with acute respiratory infection. Patients who meet the following criteria are considered to be “Patients Under Investigation (PUI)” by CDC.

- A. Fever AND pneumonia or acute respiratory distress syndrome (based on clinical or radiologic evidence) AND EITHER:
- history of travel to countries in or near the Arabian Peninsula<sup>1</sup> within 14 days before symptom onset, OR
  - close contact<sup>2</sup> 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<sup>1</sup>, OR
  - a member of a cluster<sup>3</sup> of patients with severe acute respiratory illness (e.g., fever<sup>1</sup> and pneumonia requiring hospitalization) of unknown etiology in which MERS-CoV is being evaluated, in consultation with state and local health departments,
- OR
- B. Fever AND symptoms of respiratory illness (not necessarily pneumonia; e.g., cough, shortness of breath) AND being in a healthcare facility (as a patient, worker or visitor) within 14 days before symptom onset in a country or territory in or near the Arabian Peninsula<sup>1</sup> in which recent healthcare-associated cases of MERS have been identified.
- OR
- C. Fever OR symptoms of respiratory illness (not necessarily pneumonia; e.g. cough, shortness of breath) AND close contact<sup>2</sup> with a confirmed MERS case while the case was ill.

Patients who meet the above criteria should be:

- 1) Placed under airborne precautions,
- 2) Reported to Pennsylvania Department of Health (877-PA-HEALTH or 877-724-3258) and your local health department, and
- 3) Immediately have specimens collected for laboratory testing using CDC’s MERS-CoV rRT-PCR assay at the Pennsylvania Department of Health Laboratories.

Appropriate specimens for MERS-CoV testing include lower respiratory specimens such as sputum, bronchoalveolar lavage, bronchial wash or tracheal aspirate as well as nasopharyngeal swabs, stool specimens (lower priority) and serum. To increase the likelihood of detection, multiple specimens from different sites, collected at different times after symptom onset, should be obtained. Respiratory specimens should be collected as soon as possible after symptoms begin. Ideally, respiratory specimens should be collected within 7 days of onset and before antiviral medications are administered. More information about MERS-CoV clinical specimen handling and testing can be found at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/mers/downloads/guidelines-clinical-specimens.pdf>

For further information see:

MERS-CoV webpage: <http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/MERS/index.html>

### **What can travelers do to protect themselves:**

*During your trip*

- **Take steps to prevent illness.**
  - Wash your hands often with soap and water.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
  - Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
  - Avoid contact with animals, to prevent diseases like [Middle East Respiratory Syndrome \(MERS\)](#).
  - Use only clean (unused) razors for head shaving. Male pilgrims should go to officially designated centers to be shaved, where barbers are licensed and use disposable, single-use blades.
- **Protect yourself from [hot temperatures](#) and [sun exposure](#).** Pilgrims can expect daytime temperatures over 100°F during Hajj.
  - Stay hydrated.
  - Perform rituals at night when possible.
  - Use personal umbrellas to shade yourself from the sun.
  - Wear sunscreen with SPF 15 or higher when outdoors.
- **Follow security and safety advice for [mass gatherings](#).**
  - Avoid densely crowded areas.
  - Perform rituals during non-peak hours.
  - Know where all emergency exits are and how to get to them.
  - Carry a photocopy of your passport and entry stamp.
  - Carry local emergency service numbers and contact information for the nearest US embassy or consulate in Saudi Arabia.
  - Follow all [local laws and social customs](#) .
- **Follow [food safety and water safety guidelines](#).** Contaminated food or drinks can cause [travelers' diarrhea](#) and other diseases. Travelers' diarrhea is the most common travel-related illness.
  - Avoid eating raw or undercooked animal products, such as milk and meat, to prevent diseases like MERS.
  - Eat only food that is cooked and served hot.
  - Eat fruits and vegetables you have washed in safe water or peeled yourself.
  - Drink water, sodas, or sports drinks that are bottled and sealed, or very hot coffee or tea.

- Use ice made with bottled or disinfected water.
- **Take steps to [prevent mosquito bites](#).** Mosquitoes that spread diseases, such dengue and malaria, can be found in Saudi Arabia.
- **Always wear seat belts and choose [safe transportation](#).** Motor vehicle crashes are the #1 killer of healthy US citizens in foreign countries.

*If you feel sick during your trip*

- Talk to a doctor or nurse if you feel seriously ill, especially if you have a fever.
- For more information about medical care abroad, see [Getting Health Care Abroad](#).
- Avoid contact with other people while you are sick to prevent spreading germs.

*After your trip*

- Some travel-related illnesses may not cause symptoms until after you get home. If you are not feeling well [after your trip](#), you may need to see a doctor. Be sure to tell the doctor about your travel, including where you went and what you did on your trip.
- 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 or near the Arabian Peninsula\*\*, you should call ahead to a healthcare provider and mention your recent travel.
  - Also, tell your doctor if you were bitten or scratched by an animal while traveling.

- 1- Countries considered in or near the Arabian Peninsula: Bahrain, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestinian territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Yemen.
- 2- 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.
- 3- In accordance with the World Health Organization's guidance for MERS-CoV, a cluster is defined as two or more persons with onset of symptoms within the same 14 days period, and who are associated with a specific setting such as a classroom, workplace, household, extended family, hospital, other residential institution, military barracks, or recreational camp. See WHO's [Interim Surveillance Recommendations for Human Infection with Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus](#)

Categories of Health Alert messages:

**Health Alert:** conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

**Health Advisory:** provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

**Health Update:** provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

This information is current as of August 15, 2018, but may be modified in the future.
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