

Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS)

Frequently Asked Questions



What is MERS?

Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, or MERS, is a viral respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus (MERS-CoV). It can cause mild to severe illness, with death resulting in approximately 35% of patients.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of Breath
- Diarrhea/Nausea
- Pneumonia
- Kidney Failure

How does MERS spread?

It is believed to be spread from person to person through close contact, including caring for or living with a sick person. People with MERS have also infected others in healthcare settings, including hospitals.

Who is at risk of getting MERS?

There is no evidence of ongoing spread of MERS in the Philadelphia community, and there is very low risk for the general public in the U.S. However, individuals with recent travel (within 14 days) to countries in or near the Arabian Peninsula*, close contacts of sick travelers from the Arabian Peninsula, and close contacts of a confirmed or probable case are at highest risk. Spread from sick patients to healthcare workers has also been seen.

How is MERS diagnosed and treated?

MERS can be diagnosed through the laboratory testing of blood and respiratory samples. There is no treatment for MERS. However, symptoms can be managed with care.

What should I do if I think I have MERS?

If you get a fever, cough, or shortness of breath within 14 days of travel to countries in or around the Arabian Peninsula, or have had recent contact with a sick traveler from the Arabian Peninsula, you should call a healthcare provider and mention your travel history and/or exposure.

How is MERS prevented?

People can protect themselves from MERS and other respiratory illnesses through:

- Frequent hand washing with soap and water
- Covering your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze
- Avoiding close contact, including kissing and sharing drinks or utensils, with ill persons
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces, including doorknobs and toys

Is it safe to travel?

At this time, the CDC does not recommend that anyone change their travel plans. People planning to visit areas in or around the Arabian Peninsula should monitor their own health for symptoms of illness. Travelers should wash hands before and after touching animals, and avoid contact with sick animals.

*including Bahrain, Iraq, Iran, Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen

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For more information, contact your doctor, refer to <http://www.phila.gov/Health/>, or contact the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Division of Disease Control at 215-685-6740