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Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) FAQ for San Francisco

What is MERS or MERS-CoV?

Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) is a viral respiratory illness. MERS is caused by a coronavirus called "Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus" (MERS-CoV).

What are coronaviruses?

Coronaviruses are common viruses that most people get some time in their life. Human coronaviruses usually cause mild to moderate upper-respiratory tract illnesses.

Is MERS-CoV the same as the SARS virus?

No. MERS-CoV is not the same coronavirus that caused severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003. However, like the SARS virus, MERS-CoV is most similar to coronaviruses found in bats.

What are the symptoms of MERS?

The most common symptoms of MERS-CoV infection are fever, chills, cough, and shortness of breath. Some patients have also had muscle aches, sore throat, diarrhea, and vomiting.

Does MERS-CoV spread from person to person?

MERS-CoV has been shown to spread between people who are in close contact. Close contact means:

- Any person who provides care for someone who is infected, including a healthcare worker or a family member, or had similarly close physical contact; or
- Any person who stayed at the same place (lived with or visited) as the person who is infected while they were sick.

What is the source of MERS-CoV?

We don't know for certain, but the virus likely came from an animal source. In addition to humans, MERS-CoV has been found in camels and bats in Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia.

Has anyone in the United States gotten infected?

Yes, on May 2, 2014, the first United States case of MERS-CoV was confirmed in a person who traveled from Saudi Arabia to Indiana.

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

You could be at risk for MERS-CoV infection if you had close contact with a MERS-CoV patient. Close contact includes providing care for, visiting, or living with someone while they are sick.

Can I still travel to countries in the Arabian Peninsula or neighboring countries where MERS cases have occurred?

Yes. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does not recommend that anyone change their travel plans because of MERS. The current CDC travel notice is an Alert (Level 2), which provides special precautions for travelers.

Because spread of MERS has occurred in healthcare settings, travelers going to countries in or near the Arabian Peninsula to provide health care services should practice CDC's recommendations for infection control of confirmed or suspected cases and monitor their health closely.

Travelers who are going to the area for other reasons are advised to follow standard precautions, such as hand washing and avoiding contact with people who are ill.

For more information, see CDC's travel notice on [MERS in the Arabian Peninsula](#).

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.

How can I help protect myself?

CDC advises that people follow these tips to help prevent respiratory illnesses:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds, and help young children do the same. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact, such as kissing, sharing cups, or sharing eating utensils, with sick people.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, such as toys and doorknobs.

Is there a vaccine?

No, but a vaccine may be developed in the future.

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.

Is there a lab test?

Yes. Your healthcare provider can order a lab test if needed.