



Tarrant County Public Health

BULLETIN

Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS)

What is MERS?

Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) is a viral respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus.

Who gets MERS?

So far, all the cases have been linked to countries in and near the Arabian Peninsula. Most infected people either lived in or recently traveled from there before they became ill. This virus has spread from ill people to others through close contact, such as caring for or living with an infected person. However, there is no evidence of sustained spreading in community settings.

What are the symptoms of MERS?

The time between when a person is exposed and when they start to have symptoms is 2-14 days. Most patients have had severe acute respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough and shortness of breath. For many of these people, more severe complications followed, such as pneumonia and kidney failure. Some infected people had mild, cold-like symptoms, or no symptoms at all, and recovered.

How is MERS spread?

MERS 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 to others in healthcare settings, such as hospitals. Researchers have not seen any ongoing spread of MERS in the community.

Is MERS dangerous?

About 30 percent of MERS patients have died, most with an underlying medical condition. People with underlying medical conditions may be more likely to become infected with MERS, or have a severe case. Those conditions have included weakened immune systems, diabetes, cancer, and chronic lung, heart, and kidney disease. There is no specific medicine for MERS. Treatment consists of supportive care.

Am I at risk for MERS?

MERS represents a very low risk to most people in this country. 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, call a doctor and mention your recent travel. While sick, stay home from work or school and delay future travel to protect others. If you have had close contact with someone who has a probable or confirmed MERS infection, contact a doctor for an evaluation.

Can MERS be prevented?

There is no vaccine to prevent MERS infection. Tarrant County Public Health (TCPH) advises people follow these tips to protect themselves from MERS and other respiratory illnesses:

- Don't touch your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Wash your hands often
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, then throw the tissue away.
- Avoid personal contact with sick people, such as kissing or sharing cups or eating utensils.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as toys and doorknobs.

What is Tarrant County doing about MERS?

TCPH is working with the CDC and other health agencies to closely monitor MERS globally and to better understand how it spreads and risks to the public's health. We recognize the potential for MERS to spread further and will take the necessary steps to help prevent this from happening in Tarrant County.

For more information, call 817-321-4700 or visit our Web site: <http://health.tarrantcounty.com>