



## MERS Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is MERS?**

MERS, or Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, is a respiratory illness that is caused by a virus. Most cases of MERS have been reported in or near the Arabian Peninsula.

### **Is MERS the same as SARS?**

No. Although in the same general family of viruses, the virus that causes MERS (MERS coronavirus or MERS-CoV) is different from the virus that caused Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). There have been no cases of SARS since 2004.

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

Symptoms typically include fever, cough and shortness of breath. People with weakened immune systems may experience more severe symptoms.

### **Where did the virus come from?**

It is currently not known where MERS-CoV came from, but the virus has been found in camels.

### **Is MERS contagious?**

It spreads through close contact, such as when caring for or living with an infected person. There have been no cases of MERS in New York City, and the risk to New Yorkers is very low at this time.

### **Is there a vaccine or treatment for MERS?**

There is no vaccine or treatment for MERS. Medical care is supportive and can help relieve symptoms.

### **Has anyone in the United States gotten infected?**

Yes, there have been a few cases of MERS diagnosed in the United States. So far, these have been isolated cases and there has been no spread to other people. The risk of MERS to the general public in this country remains very low.

### **What is the Health Department doing about MERS?**

The Health Department is working with the CDC to prevent the spread of MERS through surveillance and testing, and by providing information to health care providers and the general public. The Health Department is also working with JFK Airport to coordinate response measures if a suspected MERS case is identified on an airplane.

**Should I call my doctor if I recently traveled to countries in or around the Arabian Peninsula and I become ill?**

If you get a fever, cough and/or shortness of breath within 14 days after traveling in the Arabian Peninsula or neighboring countries, contact your doctor and mention your recent travel.

**Can I still travel to countries where MERS cases have occurred?**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has not recommended that people change their travel plans, but it has provided guidance to flight crews, Emergency Medical Service (EMS) units at airports and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CPB) officers about reporting ill travelers. For more information, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

**How can I help protect myself if traveling to an area affected by MERS?**

- Avoid close contact, such as kissing, sharing cups, or sharing eating utensils, with people who are ill.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, such as doorknobs, phones and toys.

**Where can I get more information?**

Visit the CDC website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) and or the World Health Organization (WHO) website at [www.who.int](http://www.who.int) and search “MERS” for detailed information and outbreak alerts.