

Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome



N SAFETY NOTICE 012/24

Issue date:	20 June 2024
Content reviewed by:	Health Protection
Distributed to:	Chief Executives; Directors of Clinical Governance; Director, Regulation and Compliance Unit
KEY MESSAGE:	Clinicians should be particularly alert for MERS around Hajj (June/July).
ACTION REQUIRED BY:	Clinicians
REQUIRED ACTION:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Distribute this Safety Notice to all relevant clinicians and clinical departments where patients may present with respiratory symptoms related to Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). 2. Ensure that clinicians and other relevant staff are aware of the recommendations in this Safety Notice and take appropriate action. 3. Confirm receipt and distribution of this Safety Notice within 72 hours to: MOH-Healthprotection@health.nsw.gov.au.
DEADLINE:	24 June 2024
We recommend you also inform:	Directors, Managers and Staff of: Emergency Departments, Virtual Care Services and Respiratory Medicine
Website:	https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/sabs/Pages/default.aspx http://internal.health.nsw.gov.au/quality/sabs/index.html
Review date:	December 2024

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Situation

Many people travel to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj (14th – 19th June 2024). Travellers will be returning from the pilgrimage over the following weeks. Clinicians should be alert for Middle Eastern respiratory syndrome (MERS) and other travel-related illnesses in unwell individuals returning from the Middle East.

Background

MERS coronavirus (MERS-CoV), distinct from SARS-CoV and SARS-CoV-2, is a zoonotic virus transmitted to humans via infected dromedary camels in the Middle East through direct or indirect contact. Secondary transmission between humans is mostly associated with healthcare settings but has also occurred among family and workplace close contacts. As of April 2024, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported 2613 cases and 941 deaths (36% fatality rate) since the first case in 2012, though mild cases may be underreported. All cases have been linked to travel or residence in the Middle East.

Assessment

MERS remains a risk in the Middle East. It is currently a peak travel period from the Middle East, significantly increasing the risk of MERS and other travel-related illnesses (e.g., measles) in travellers from the region. Awareness of this increased risk is essential for the timely identification and management of potential cases.

Recommendations

Health care facilities should implement infection prevention and control measures to prevent the possible spread of MERS-CoV. Ensure timely identification and management of cases, isolation of suspected cases, transmission-based precautions, and education and training for clinicians.

Consider MERS if a patient has symptoms of acute respiratory illness and has either:

- Recently travelled from or resided in the Middle East
- Been in contact with a symptomatic person from the Middle East
- Been in a health care facility with recent MERS cases
- Had contact with camels or raw camel products in the Middle East
- Been in contact with a probable or confirmed MERS case within 14 days before symptom onset

If you suspect MERS, apply initial infection prevention and control measures: Airborne, Contact & Droplet Precautions and Negative Pressure isolation room, obtain a full travel and exposure history, and contact the Specialist Service for High Consequence Infectious Diseases on 1800 HCID 00 or 1800 424 300.

Further information

- World Health Organisation MERS Fact Sheet - [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/middle-east-respiratory-syndrome-coronavirus-\(mers-cov\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/middle-east-respiratory-syndrome-coronavirus-(mers-cov))

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- NSW Biocontainment Centre - Home (sharepoint.com) - <https://nswhealth.sharepoint.com/sites/BIOCON-WSLHD>
- Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care – <https://www.health.gov.au/diseases/middle-east-respiratory-syndrome-mers>
- NSW Policy Directive Early Response to High Consequence Infectious Diseases - https://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/Pages/doc.aspx?dn=PD2024_005#:~:text=Summary,this%20policy%20directive%20is%20mandatory
- CEC High Consequence Infectious Diseases – Infection Prevention and Control Principles - <https://www.cec.health.nsw.gov.au/keep-patients-safe/infection-prevention-and-control/high-consequence-infectious-diseases>