

Frequently Asked Questions

What is MERS?

Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) is an infection of the lungs caused by a virus known as a coronavirus and is written as MERS-CoV.

Coronaviruses can cause illness similar to the common cold in the winter and spring months. This coronavirus is different than these viruses and has never been seen in humans before.

Is MERS the same as the SARS virus?

No. SARS and MERS are both called coronaviruses, however, the two viruses are not the same.

Who gets MERS?

Most people who became ill with MERS had traveled to, lived in, or were in close contact with someone who had traveled to the Arabian Peninsula. It is unclear why some individuals become ill and why others do not. People with chronic health conditions or weak immune systems may be at greater risk.

Does MERS spread from person to person?

The virus that causes MERS has been shown to spread between two people who are in close contact. The virus has also spread from infected people to health care workers.

What are the symptoms of MERS?

Most people who got infected with MERS-CoV became severely ill with a respiratory illness with symptoms such as:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

About half of the people with severe symptoms have died. Some people have been reported as having a mild respiratory illness.

How is MERS diagnosed?

The New Jersey Department of Health has the ability to test for MERS. If a health care provider suspects MERS, samples from the patient (swab from the nose or mouth) can be tested. Health care providers can make a request for testing to the local health department, who in turn will contact the New Jersey Department of Health. If the case meets criteria for being a suspected case of MERS, the New Jersey Department of Health will arrange for testing to be done.

What is the treatment for MERS?

MERS is a new illness and little is known about how to treat it. As of now, there is no known treatment other than supportive care such as fluids, oxygen, etc.

Is there a vaccine?

No, but the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is working with partners in trying to develop one.

How can I help protect myself and others?

Many of the same things you do to prevent the common cold can also prevent other types of illness such as MERS. The following tips can help keep you healthy.

- 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, or sharing cups or eating utensils with sick people.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as toys and doorknobs.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.

What if I have travel planned to the Arabian Peninsula?

CDC has not issued a travel health warning for any country due to MERS.

Following the steps listed above ("How can I protect myself and others") also apply when traveling.

What if I recently traveled to countries in the Arabian Peninsula or nearby countries and got sick?

If you get a fever, cough, or shortness of breath within 14 days after traveling from countries in the Arabian Peninsula or nearby countries, you should **call** your doctor and tell him/her about your recent travel. If you go to see a doctor, **wear a mask** that covers your mouth and nose or ask for one as soon as you get to the doctor's office. If your doctor thinks you have MERS, they should contact the local health department to request testing.

Which countries are in the Arabian Peninsula or are nearby?

- Bahrain
- Iran
- Iraq
- Israel
- Jordan
- Kuwait
- Lebanon
- Palestinian territories
- Oman
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- Syria
- United Arab Emirates
- Yemen

Where can I get more information on MERS?

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department—<http://localhealth.nj.gov>
- NJ Department of Health— <http://nj.gov/health/cd/mers/index.shtml>
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention— <http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/mers>

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional. Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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