

DISPATCH



MIDDLE EAST RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (MERS)

What is MERS?

A severe viral respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus called MERS-CoV. The first reported case of MERS occurred in Saudi Arabia in 2012. Over 350 people have been infected, and about 30% of those infected have died. Thus far, all cases have been associated with residence or travel to the Middle East.

Have there been any cases reported in the US?

Yes, on May 2, 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirmed the first U.S. case in Indiana. The individual had recently traveled from Saudi Arabia to the United States. This is the only confirmed case of MERS in the United States to date.

Can MERS spread from person to person?

Yes, MERS has been shown to spread between people in close personal contact, such as between healthcare providers or family members caring for an infected person.

What are the symptoms of MERS?

The majority of people infected with MERS present with severe respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough, and shortness of breath. About 30% of infected patients have died. However, some people may develop only a mild respiratory illness.

What is the treatment for MERS?

There is no specific treatment for MERS aside from supportive care such as oxygen and respiratory support as needed, pain control, and fluids for dehydration.

Is there a vaccine available?

No, there is no vaccine currently available.

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Am I at risk?

At this time, only people with recent travel to the Middle East or close contact with an infected patient are considered to be at risk for developing MERS. If you are concerned that you have been exposed to MERS, you should contact your healthcare provider and notify your supervisor.

What can firefighters and EMS personnel do to protect themselves and their families?

1. **Be aware** of the symptoms of MERS-CoV. When responding to calls for patients with fever and shortness of breath, ask if the patient has recently traveled to the Middle East or has been in contact with an ill individual who recently traveled to the Middle East.
2. **Be aware** of any increases in respiratory complaints within your service area and report any suspicions to your supervisor.
3. **Protect yourself** with standard contact, droplet, and airborne precautions by using personal protective equipment including gloves and, at minimum, an N-95 respirator.
4. **Use Universal Precautions**
 - o Assume patients with respiratory symptoms are contagious and provide masks for symptomatic patients
 - o Limit the number of crew members having direct patient contact
 - o Personal protective equipment (PPE) (gloves, gowns, and respiratory protection). **IAFF recommends P100 respirators** for all patients with respiratory symptoms such as cough

-Content adapted from CDC and FirstWatch.net.

For more information, please visit the website links below:

CDC: <http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/mers/faq.html>

FirstWatch: http://www.firstwatch.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Update_MERS_in_US_20140502.pdf