

Guidelines on Prevention of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome for Tour Leaders and Tour Guides Operating Overseas Tours

The Department of Health advises tour leaders and tour guides operating overseas tours to take the following precautionary measures to minimise the risk of themselves as well as that of fellow travellers in contracting and spreading Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS).

Disease information

<https://www.chp.gov.hk/en/healthtopics/content/24/26528.html>

Department of Health strongly advises travel agents organising tours to the Middle East NOT to arrange camel rides and activities involving camel contact, which may increase the risk of infection.

Before departure, a tour leader or tour guide should not go aboard or receive travellers if he/she experiences the following:

1. Feeling unwell, especially having a fever; or
2. Had close contact with suspected or confirmed MERS patients during the last 14 days. (Close contact means cared for, lived with or physical contact with an infected person.)

Tour leaders and tour guides are key persons for members of a tour group when travelling overseas, and also take care of their health during the trip. They are advised to adopt the following recommendations:

Before the Trip

- Please refer to the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) website for affected areas updates: (http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/distribution_of_mers_cases_en.pdf).
- Check with the consulate or health authorities for any health advice or travel advisory imposed at the destination. Inform group members and make arrangements as appropriate.
- Prepare the following items:
 - Lists of doctors, clinics and hospitals of the destination
 - Tissue paper, surgical masks, thermometers and vomit bags for members' use when necessary
 - 70 to 80% alcohol-based handrub for hand hygiene when hand washing facilities are not available
 - Telephone numbers of family members or emergency contact numbers of the group
 - Telephone numbers of relevant Consulates in the destination

During the Trip

Restaurants

- Patronise reputable and hygienic restaurants which provide liquid soap and hand washing facilities.
- Use serving chopsticks and spoons.
- Avoid consuming raw or undercooked animal products, including milk and meat, or foods which may be contaminated by animal secretions, excretions (such as urine) or products, unless they have been properly cooked, washed or peeled.

The Tour Coach

- Arrange an appropriate coach for the group to avoid overcrowding inside the coach.
- Every day, the driver should clean the interior of the coach before and after carrying tourists.
 - For general cleaning, use 1 in 99 diluted household bleach (mixing 10 ml of bleach containing 5.25% sodium hypochlorite with 990 ml of water) for non-metallic surface, wait until dry and then rinse with water. For metallic surface, disinfect with 70% alcohol.
 - If places are contaminated by respiratory secretions, vomitus or excreta, use strong absorbent disposable towels to clean up the visible matter. Then disinfect the surface and the neighbouring area with appropriate disinfectant. For non-metallic surface, disinfect with 1 in 49 diluted household bleach (mixture of 10ml of household bleach containing 5.25% hypochlorite solution with 490ml of water), leave for 15 - 30 minutes, and then rinse with water. For metallic surface, disinfect with 70% alcohol.
- Inspect and clean the air conditioning system frequently and open the windows as possible to ensure good ventilation.
- Vomit bags and tissue papers are available for travellers' use.

Health Advice for Group Members

- Request members to cooperate with port health authorities and comply with all necessary immigration procedures and health checks at destinations.
- Avoid going to farms, barns and markets with camels.
- Avoid contact with animals, especially camels including riding camels or participating in any activity involving contact with camels.
- Wash hands before and after touching animals in case of visits to farms, barns or markets with camels.
- Avoid close contact with sick people, especially those have fever and/or respiratory symptoms such as coughing, sneezing, sore throat or muscle pain. Also, avoid visit to healthcare settings with MERS patients.
- Remind members to observe good personal, food and environmental hygiene:

Personal hygiene

- Avoid touching eyes, mouth and nose.
- Keep hands clean at all times. Wash hands frequently, especially before touching your eyes, mouth or nose, before handling food or eating, after going to toilet, after touching public installations such as escalator handrails, elevator control panels or door knobs, or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretion after coughing or sneezing.
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water, and rub for at least 20 seconds. Then rinse with water and dry with a disposable paper towel or hand dryer.
- If hand washing facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, hand hygiene with 70 to 80% alcohol-based handrub is an effective alternative.
- Cover your nose and mouth with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Do not spit or litter. Use a tissue paper to hold your spit. Dispose of the soiled tissues into a lidded rubbish bin, and then wash hands thoroughly.
- Bring surgical masks with you and use it when necessary.

Food hygiene

- Five keys to food safety:
 - Choose safe raw materials
 - Keep hands and utensils clean
 - Separate raw and cooked food
 - Cook thoroughly
 - Keep food at safe temperature
- Use serving chopsticks and spoons at meal times. Do not share lunch boxes or drinks with others.
- Remind members to maintain healthy lifestyle practices throughout the trip; do not smoke and avoid alcohol consumption.
- Advise members to observe their own health condition during the trip. If they feel unwell, such as developing fever, respiratory or bowel symptoms (e.g. vomiting or diarrhoea), they should inform the tour leader/ guide and seek medical attention promptly.
- Provide the following information to members in case of emergency or they have any discomfort :
 - The name, room number and telephone number of the tour leader/tour guide
 - Telephone number of the hotel's reception desk

Handling of Sick Members

- The tour leader/tour guide should assist the sick member to check the body temperature.
- If a member presents with fever, respiratory or bowel symptoms:
 - The sick member and his/her carers should put on a surgical mask immediately;

- Arrange medical attention at once.
- Seek medical advice on whether the sick member could continue travelling with the group. The tour members should follow the local health authorities' instructions for investigation.

After the Trip

- Remind group members to wear a surgical mask and seek medical attention immediately if they have develop fever, respiratory or bowel symptoms within 14 days after returning from the affected area. Reveal their recent travel history, including transit, to doctors.
- Keep personal information and telephone numbers of the group members for at least 1 month to facilitate the Centre for Health Protection's investigation when necessary.

For more information, please visit:

- Travel Health Service website at www.travelhealth.gov.hk
- Centre for Health Protection thematic website at <https://www.chp.gov.hk/en/features/26511.html>

Centre for Health Protection

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