

Health Advice for Driver, Crew and Operational Staff of Public Transport for the Prevention of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS)

The Department of Health advises drivers, crew and operational staff of public transport companies to take the following precautionary measures at their workplaces to minimize the risk of contracting and spreading MERS:

Causative agent

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which include viruses that may cause mild illness like common cold as well as severe illness like severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in humans. There are 3 main subgroups of coronaviruses: alpha (α), beta (β) and gamma (γ). Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV), formerly known as novel coronavirus (NCoV), is a beta coronavirus which has not been identified in humans before and is different from any coronaviruses (including SARS-coronavirus) that have been found in humans or animals.

Affected Areas

The affected areas of MERS include the Arabian Peninsula and its neighboring countries (including Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Yemen). So far, over 95% of the confirmed cases were reported by Middle East countries. For the remaining cases, most of them either acquired the infection in the Middle East during travel or work, or through close contact with another patient who acquired the infection in Middle East. Moreover, there has been an outbreak of MERS in Korea since the end of May 2015 with transmissions mainly occurred in healthcare facilities. Please refer to website of Centre for Health Protection for affected areas
update: http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/distribution_of_mers_cases_en.pdf

During normal daily life

1. Maintain good hand hygiene

- Wash hands frequently with liquid soap and water especially:
 - ◆ before touching your eyes, nose or mouth;
 - ◆ handling food or before eating;
 - ◆ after using the toilet; and
- Touching public installations or equipment such as escalator handrails, elevator control panels or door knobs.
- Use hand dryer or disposable paper towel for drying hand.
- Rubs hands with 70 – 80% alcohol-based handrub if hands are not visibly soiled

2. Maintain cough etiquette

- Cover the nose and mouth with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissue paper into rubbish bins with lids and clean hand afterwards

- If staff develops respiratory symptoms or fever; they should consult doctor early and take sick leave if necessary.
3. Wear a surgical mask
- The following staff are recommended to wear a surgical mask:
 - ◆ when they have symptoms of respiratory infection or fever; or
 - ◆ when they contact person with respiratory infection or fever.
4. Ensure good ventilation inside train/vehicle/vessel compartments
- Ensure the air-conditioning system is well maintained with sufficient fresh air supply in the compartments.
 - Ensure the air filter and ducting are cleaned regularly and maintained in good working condition at all times.
 - Ensure the guidelines laid down in the “Practice Note on Managing Air Quality in Air-conditioned Public Transport Facilities” for buses and railways published by the Environmental Protection Department are followed for the maintenance of good air quality
5. Keep train/vehicle/vessel compartments clean
- Wash/wipe compartments with detergent and water regularly. Pay attention to the cleaning of seats, handrails, safety belts and buckles and air inlet/outlet inside compartments.
 - If cleaning vomitus, use a 1:49 diluted household bleach solution (mixing 1 part of household bleach containing 5.25% sodium hypochlorite in 49 parts water). Rinse the area with water and wipe dry.
 - Wear appropriate personal protective equipment e.g. gloves when carrying out cleansing works.

When there is a confirmed case of MERS in HK

Additional measures to the above

1. Ensure good ventilation inside train/vehicle/vessel compartments
- Keep windows open as appropriate and where possible to maintain good ventilation, including the driver/captain’s cabin.
 - For enclosed compartments or where air-conditioning is necessary; the fresh air inlet volume should be adjusted to the maximum level.
2. Enhance the cleanliness of the train/vehicle/vessel compartments
- Step up cleansing schedule.
 - Use a 1:99 diluted household bleach solution (mixing 1 part of household bleach containing 5.25% sodium hypochlorite in 99 parts water) to wash/wipe compartments regularly. Then rinse with water and wipe dry.
 - Assign staff to monitor closely the cleansing works for vehicle/vessel compartments at termini/piers in between departures.

3. For public protection

- For passengers with symptoms of respiratory infection or fever:
 - ◆ Advise those passengers to wear a mask; and
 - ◆ If situation warrants, assist to call for ambulance service or the Marine Police (if on out-lying island) for conveyance of the patient to the hospital.

Centre for Health Protection

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