

Health Advice in Workplace
for the Prevention of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS)

The Department of Health advises staff and office management 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

Staff:

- Maintain good personal and environmental hygiene
- Wash hands frequently with liquid soap and water especially after sneezing, coughing or cleaning the nose
- Rub hands with 70 - 80% alcohol-based handrub if they are not visibly soiled
- Cover nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing with tissue paper, and dispose of soiled tissue paper in a lidded rubbish bin properly

- Building up good body immunity by having a balanced diet, regular exercise, adequate rest, reducing stress, do not smoke and avoid alcohol consumption.
- To prevent the disease, it is important to avoid unnecessary travel to areas affected by MERS. Upon returning from the affected area, members of the public should observe closely the health conditions for 14 days.
- Staff develop respiratory symptoms such as fever and cough should :
 - ◆ wear a surgical mask
 - ◆ consult the doctor promptly

Office management:

- Maintain environment clean and hygienic
 - Clean the workplace with detergent and water regularly and keep it dry.
 - Rubbish should be properly wrapped up and discarded into garbage bins with lids. Empty garbage bins at least once a day.
- Maintain toilet clean and hygienic
 - Keep toilets clean and dry.
 - Provide liquid soap, hand dryers/disposable paper towels for hand washing.
 - Ensure the flushing system of the toilet, and hand dryers are in proper function at all times. Flush immediately after using toilet.
- If places are contaminated by blood, secretions, vomitus or excreta etc:
 - Cleansing staff should wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) including surgical mask, rubber gloves, plastic apron and eye protection (goggles/ face shield).
 - Use strong absorbent disposable paper towels to wipe away the blood, secretions, vomitus or excreta.
 - Put the used absorbent disposable paper towels in a garbage bag carefully without contaminating oneself/ the environment.
 - Disinfect the surface and the neighbouring area with appropriate disinfectant.
 - ◆ If places are contaminated by secretions, vomitus or excreta, use 1 part of household bleach containing 5.25% sodium hypochlorite to 49 parts of water, leave for 15-30 minutes, rinse with water and wipe dry afterwards.
 - ◆ If places are contaminated by blood, use 1 part of household bleach containing 5.25% sodium hypochlorite to 4 parts of water, leave for 10 minutes, rinse with water and wipe dry afterwards.
 - After the procedures, put all the waste in the garbage bag.

- Carefully remove PPE and put them in the garbage bag, and then wash hands with liquid soap and water.
 - Seal the garbage bag securely and dispose it properly in covered rubbish bin.
 - Clean hands thoroughly.
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- Staff who developed respiratory symptoms such as fever and cough, should remind him/her to stay at home, take rest, and seek medical advice immediately.

Centre for Health Protection

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