



Epidemiology Unit

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FACT SHEET – MIDDLE EAST RESPIRATORY SYNDROME - CORONA VIRUS INFECTION (MERS-CoV)

MERS-Corona Virus Infection (MERS-CoV)

MERS-Corona virus Infection is a new infection caused by a new strain of a corona virus previously not identified in humans.

Infectious Agent

Corona viruses are a large family of viruses that are known to cause illness in humans and animals. In humans, members of this large family of viruses are known to cause illnesses ranging from the common cold to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The new virus, MERS-CoV and the SARS causing virus have important differences.

Symptoms

In humans, this is an acute, serious respiratory illness with fever, cough, shortness of breath, and breathing difficulties. Based on current clinical experience, the infection generally presents as pneumonia. Many have also had gastrointestinal symptoms, including diarrhoea. It has caused kidney failure in some cases. About half of people infected with MERS-CoV have died. In people with immune deficiencies, the disease may have an atypical presentation.

It is important to note that the current understanding of the illness caused by this infection is based on a limited number of cases and may change as more information becomes available.

Transmission

Source of the virus, the types of exposure that lead to infection, the mode of transmission, the clinical pattern and course of disease is not known with certainty with currently available evidence.

Multiple clusters of cases had been observed in which human-to-human transmission has occurred. However, the mechanism of transmission occurred in all of these cases, whether respiratory (e.g. coughing, sneezing) or direct physical contact with the patient or

contamination of the environment by the patient, is unknown. Thus far, no sustained community transmission has been observed.

Laboratory Diagnosis

The new virus strain can be detected through Reverse-Transcriptase Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT PCR). Evidence had shown that specimen from lower respiratory tract results in a higher yield.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment or vaccine for the disease caused by this virus currently available. Therefore treatment should be based on the symptoms of the patient and supportive care for infected persons can be highly effective.

Current Global Situation

From September 2012 to date, WHO has been informed of a global total of 94 confirmed cases of human infection with MERS-CoV, including 46 deaths. Reporting countries are France, Germany, Italy Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. Majority of cases have had some association (whether direct or indirect) with the Middle East.

WHO Recommendations

Based on the current situation and available information, WHO encourages all Member countries to strengthen their surveillance for Severe Acute Respiratory Infections (SARI) and to carefully review any unusual patterns. WHO is currently working to review recommendations for surveillance and monitoring.

WHO does not recommend establishment of special screening at points of entry (airports and sea ports) or application of any travel or trade restrictions.