

Countermeasures against MERS

Kyoto University Health Service, June 23, 2015

■ About MERS

Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) is an illness caused by a virus (more specifically, a coronavirus) called Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV). MERS affects the respiratory system (lungs and breathing tubes). Most MERS patients developed severe acute respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough and shortness of breath. About 3–5 out of every 10 patients reported with MERS have died. The incubation period for MERS (time between when a person is exposed to MERS-CoV and when they start to have symptoms) is usually about 5 or 6 days, but can range from 2–14 days.

■ Symptoms & Treatment

Most people confirmed to have MERS-CoV infection have had severe acute respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough, shortness of breath. Some people also had gastrointestinal symptoms including diarrhea and nausea/vomiting. For many people with MERS, more severe complications followed, such as pneumonia and kidney failure.

There is no specific antiviral treatment recommended for MERS-CoV infection. Individuals with MERS can seek medical care to help relieve symptoms. For severe cases, current treatment includes care to support vital organ functions.

■ Prevention

MERS-CoV, like other coronaviruses, is thought to spread from an infected person's respiratory secretions, such as through coughing. However, the precise ways the virus spreads are not currently well understood. We routinely advise that people help protect themselves from respiratory illnesses by taking everyday preventive actions:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or a flu mask when you cough or sneeze, then throw the tissue in the trash.

■ Recent Travelers from the Republic of Korea

If you develop a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as cough or shortness of breath, within 14 days after traveling from the Arabian Peninsula and the Republic of Korea, you should call to a quarantine station or a public health center before going to a healthcare provider.



Illustrations by Hirono Takeda