



June 5, 2015

Important Updated Information on Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome-Coronavirus (MERS CoV) for BC Physicians

The Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) is a particular type of coronavirus which has caused illness over the past two years, primarily in the Middle East (most commonly the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Qatar).

On May 20, 2015, the Republic of Korea reported a case of MERS-CoV with recent travel history to the Middle East. This index case has resulted in numerous secondary and tertiary cases and spread to several hospitals in South Korea.

The spread of MERS-CoV from the Middle East to another country is not unexpected and there is no sign of sustained person-to-person transmission. However, clusters of the size that South Korea is experiencing have not been seen outside of the Middle East.

The situation in South Korea is a reminder that the risk of imported cases is still a concern, making ongoing surveillance for MERS-CoV crucial. The outbreak is also a good reminder of the importance of appropriately managing patients with novel respiratory illnesses such as MERS-CoV to prevent secondary transmission.

As part of ongoing efforts to protect against respiratory infections, health care settings should implement appropriate infection prevention & control and occupational health & safety practices. These include conducting passive and active surveillance for acute respiratory infections, which involves determining if patients have respiratory symptoms and recent travel history, appropriate isolation of patients with respiratory symptoms and use of personal protective equipment by healthcare workers.

Clinicians who identify patients with respiratory infection and recent travel history to South Korea should determine if they had exposure to a confirmed case of MERS-CoV or contact with the South Korean health system. Patients with respiratory symptoms and travel history to South Korea, but without contact with a confirmed case or contact with the health care system do not require laboratory testing for MERS-CoV. Health care workers considering the need to test a patient with travel history to the Republic of Korea or the Middle East should contact their local Medical Health Officer and the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) Public Health Microbiology Reference Laboratory at (604) 661-7033.

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The risk to British Columbians from MERS-CoV is low. To date there have been only two cases identified in North America (both in the US), and the only cases which have been found outside of the Middle East have been directly or indirectly linked to travel to that region.

More details on MERS-CoV and the ongoing outbreak can be found on the BCCDC website at: <http://www.bccdc.ca/dis-cond/DiseaseStatsReports/EmergingRespiratoryVirusUpdates.htm>.

We and the BCCDC will continue to monitor the risk posed by MERS-CoV, including the ongoing outbreaks in the Middle East and the localized outbreak in South Korea. We will communicate any updates to our risk assessment.

Please review the web link above and contact your MHO or our office should you have questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Dr. Perry Kendall
Provincial Health Officer



Dr. Bonnie Henry
Deputy Provincial Health Officer

Medical Health Officer Contact Information

The medical health officer for your region can be reached at the following numbers:

- Fraser Health: (604) 587-3828 (M-F, 8:30-4:30) OR (604) 527-4806 (after hours)
- Interior Health: 1-866-457-5648 (24/7)
- Island Health: (250) 519-3406 (M-F, 8:30-5:00) OR 1-800-204-6166 (after hours)
- Northern Health: (250) 565-2000 (24/7)
- Vancouver Coastal Health: (604) 675-3900 (M-F, 8:30-5:00) OR (604) 527-4893 (after hours)

Office of the Provincial Health Officer: 250 952-1330