

Current Health Event

WHO Emergency Committee discusses Current Status of MERS

On Tuesday, 13 May 2014, the 5th meeting of the WHO Emergency Committee convened by the Director-General in Geneva under the International Health Regulations (IHR 2005) to discuss the current status of the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS).

Editorial note:

The Emergency Committee indicated that the seriousness of the situation had increased in terms of public health impact, but that there is no evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission. As a result of their deliberations, the Committee concluded that the conditions for a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) have not yet been met according to the International Health Regulations (IHR 2005).

The Committee strongly urged WHO and Member States to:

- take immediate steps to: improve national policies for infection prevention and control,
- initiate and accelerate critical investigations,
- support countries that are particularly vulnerable,
- strengthen case and contact identification and management,
- greatly enhance awareness and effective risk communication,
- strengthen inter-sectoral collaboration and information sharing across ministries and with relevant international organizations,
- develop and disseminate advice regarding mass gatherings to prevent further spread of MERS-CoV;
- share information in a timely manner with WHO, in accordance with the International Health Regulations (2005).



However, the Committee emphasized that its concern about the situation had significantly increased. Their concerns centred on the recent sharp rise in cases; systemic weaknesses in infection prevention and control, gaps in critical information; and possible exportation of cases to vulnerable countries.

It is worth mentioning that WHO does not advise special screening at points of entry with regard to this event nor does it currently recommend the application of any travel or trade restrictions.

The International Health Regulations (IHR) are an international legal instrument that is binding on 196 countries across the globe, including all the Member States of WHO.

18 Countries reported MERS since December 2013:

Egypt, France, Greece, Jordan, KSA, Kuwait, Italy, Lebanon, Malaysia, Netherlands, Oman, Philippines, Qatar, Tunisia, UAE, UK, USA, and Yemen.

IHR 2005:

The IHR (2005) include many rights and obligations for States Parties. These cover activities ranging from surveillance and response, to notification and verification to WHO of certain public health events and risks, to rules on application of health measures to international travelers, trade and transportation, requirements for sanitary conditions and services at international ports, airports and ground crossings and development of minimum public health capacities for surveillance, assessment, response and reporting for a broad range of risks throughout the territories of all States Parties.

The first Lebanese reported MERS Case:

On 8 May, 2014, the National IHR Focal Point (NFP) of Lebanon reported the first laboratory-confirmed case of MERS-CoV infection.

- On 22 April 2014, a 60 year-old Lebanese male health-care worker presented with high-grade fever. On 27 April 2014, he was diagnosed as a case of pneumonia (fever, dyspnoea, and productive cough) and was admitted to the hospital on 30 April 2014. On 8 May 2014, he tested positive for MERS-CoV. He is reported to have comorbidities. He was in a stable condition in hospital and was released on 7 May 2014.
- The patient gave history of recent travel to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia (Jeddah, 8 weeks prior to onset of symptom) and UAE (5 weeks) where he visited one of the hospitals that had been facing an upsurge of MERS-CoV cases.
- No history of contact with laboratory confirmed cases, animals or intake of raw camel milk. *Patient was discharged in good condition.*

Cumulative Notifiable diseases in Lebanon (Syrian)

Disease	2013 Cumul	2014 Cumul*	Apr	May
Vaccine Preventable Diseases				
Polio	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Acute Flaccid Paralysis	34(7)	14(6)	4(1)	1(0)
Measles	1760(232)	183(69)	58(23)	18(7)
Mumps	14(2)	257(32)	132(12)	41(4)
Pertussis	59(9)	28(8)	3(2)	1(0)
Rabies	1(1)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Rubella	27(1)	8(6)	3(3)	0(0)
Tetanus	4(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Viral Hep B	141(8)	79(9)	28(5)	11(1)
Water/Food Borne Diseases				
Brucellosis	189(12)	49(2)	15(1)	7(0)
Hydatid cyst	13(3)	6(0)	1(0)	1(0)
Typhoid Fever	407(21)	60(3)	10(3)	3(0)
Viral Hep A	1551(220)	566(96)	76(10)	33(15)
Other Diseases				
Leishmaniasis	1033(1032)	267(265)	34(34)	1(1)
Meningitis	204(24)	74(7)	26(3)	4(0)
Viral Hep C	103(4)	33(1)	6(0)	4(0)

Source: Ministry of Public Health, Lebanon