

Update on latest MERS situation in Saudi Arabia

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (February 25) closely monitoring 19 additional cases of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) by Saudi Arabia from December 1 last year to January 31 this year. The CHP again urged the public to pay special attention to safety during travel, taking due consideration of the health risks in the places they visit.

According to the WHO, the 19 additional cases involve 12 male and seven female patients aged 27 to 85, with 16 of them having underlying illnesses. Among them, two had exposure to camels and consumed camel milk, three were health care workers, six had contact with previously confirmed patients and eight have passed away.

According to the latest information, 2 519 cases have been reported to the WHO (with 866 deaths), including 2 300 in 10 Middle East countries comprising 2 121 in Saudi Arabia, 91 in the United Arab Emirates, 28 in Jordan, 24 in Oman, 22 in Qatar, six in Iran, four in Kuwait, two in Lebanon, and one each in Yemen and Bahrain.

"We will maintain close communication with the WHO and relevant health authorities," a spokesman for the CHP said.

"As countries in the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, continue to report MERS cases from time to time, travellers should refrain from going to farms, barns or markets with camels and avoid contact with sick persons and animals, especially camels, birds or poultry. Most of the cases reported in the Middle East had a history of exposure to camels, consumption of camel milk or contact with other MERS patients," the spokesman said.

"Scientific evidence shows that camels are reservoirs for MERS Coronavirus (MERS-CoV). Camels infected with MERS-CoV may not show any signs of infection. Infected animals may shed MERS-CoV through nasal and eye discharge and faeces, and potentially in their milk and urine. The virus may also be found in the raw organs and meat of infected animals. Therefore, the best protection is to practise good hygiene and avoid direct contact with all of these," the spokesman added.

From time to time, suspected MERS cases reported to the CHP for investigation involve patients with a history of contact with camels in the Middle East. The CHP strongly advises travel agents organising tours to the Middle East to abstain from arranging camel rides and activities involving direct contact with camels, which are known risk factors for acquiring MERS-CoV.

Travellers to affected areas should maintain vigilance, adopt appropriate health precautions and take heed of personal, food and

environmental hygiene. The public may visit the MERS page of the [CHP](#) and its [Travel Health Service](#) to learn more about MERS statistics in [affected areas](#). The public should also refer to the CHP's [Facebook page](#) and [YouTube channel](#) and the WHO's [latest news](#) for more information and health advice. Tour leaders and tour guides operating overseas tours are advised to refer to the CHP's [health advice on MERS](#).