

Update on latest MERS situation in Saudi Arabia

In response to the World Health Organization (WHO)'s report on four new cases of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in Saudi Arabia, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (March 14) appealed to the public to be vigilant and to take appropriate protective measures when visiting affected regions.

According to the WHO, the new cases involved four males aged between 27 and 78 with underlying health conditions. Two of them have passed away. Of the four cases, one was found to have indirect contact with dromedary camels and their raw milk.

Two of the abovementioned cases were found to be epidemiologically linked to exposures in the same healthcare facility. After the first case was confirmed on November 11, 2024, an additional case was revealed through contact tracing, which was suspected to be infected in that healthcare facility.

The WHO maintains its overall risk assessment of MERS in Saudi Arabia and expects that more cases of MERS will be reported in the Middle East or other countries where the virus is circulating in dromedaries. According to the latest information, 2 618 cases of MERS (including 945 deaths) have been notified by the WHO since 2012, and Saudi Arabia has notified 2 209 cases (including the above patients).

The CHP will maintain close communication with the WHO and relevant health authorities to monitor the activity and trends of MERS.

Among the reported cases in the Middle East, most of the patients had been in contact with dromedary camels, consumed camel milk, or had contact with patients who had been diagnosed with MERS. Travellers to the region should avoid visiting farms, barns or markets where there are dromedary camels, as well as contact with patients and animals, especially dromedary camels.

The CHP also recommends travel agents organising tours to the Middle East to refrain from arranging for visitors to ride dromedary camels or to participate in any activities involving direct contact with dromedary camels, which are known risk factors for acquiring MERS-CoV.

Scientific evidence shows that dromedary camels are reservoirs for MERS-CoV. Dromedary camels infected with MERS-CoV may not show any signs of infection. Infected animals may shed MERS-CoV through their nasal and eye discharge and faeces, and potentially in their milk and urine. The virus can also be found in the raw offal and meat of infected animals. Therefore, the best preventive measure is to maintain good personal hygiene and avoid the

above risk factors.

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](#).