



COUNTY OF IMPERIAL
PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

September 6, 2018

PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

Health Issues Associated with Travel to Middle East

Reports of Suspected MERS in Individuals who Attended Hajj

Health departments are investigating suspect cases of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in individuals returning to the US after attending Hajj, which ended August 24. The Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, is one of the world's largest mass gatherings. In 2018, Hajj took place from August 19 to August 24.

To date, no cases of suspect MERS have been reported in Imperial County.

In addition, there are reports of an influenza outbreak at Hajj, and cases of confirmed influenza A in individuals with recent travel to Hajj have been reported in other states.

Because of influenza activity at Hajj, there might be more suspect MERS cases. Health-care providers are reminded to be vigilant for suspect MERS cases and to ensure that influenza testing is also conducted on these patients.

MERS is caused by a distinctive coronavirus (MERS-CoV). Typical early symptoms include fever, cough, chills, and shortness of breath. Pneumonia is common. Some cases have had diarrhea, nausea, or vomiting. Other cases tested after their contact with MERS patients have had no symptoms. Complications of MERS include severe pneumonia and organ failure. Approximately 35% of confirmed cases have died. Most severe cases of MERS have had underlying chronic medical conditions. There is no known vaccine or specific treatment; management is supportive.

MERS-CoV has spread from ill people to others through close contact, such as caring for or living with an infected person. The virus does not seem to pass easily from person to person unless there is close contact, such as occurs when providing unprotected care to a patient. Dromedary camels are a host for MERS-CoV, but their roles in transmission is unclear.

Report suspect cases of MERS or confirmed cases of influenza A associated with travel to Hajj to the public health department. For assistance in reporting, call (442) 265-1464 or send an email to phepireport@co.imperial.ca.us

For more information, go to:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/MERS-CoV.aspx>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/mers/interim-guidance.html>

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