

**Ministry of Health
and Long-Term Care**

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MEMORANDUM**TO: Medical officers of health, health sector employers and health care workers****RE: MERS-CoV outbreak in the Republic of Korea**

On May 20, 2015, the Republic of Korea reported a case of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) with recent travel history to the Middle East. This index case has resulted in numerous secondary and possibly tertiary cases.

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 (ARIs), which involves determining if patients have respiratory symptoms and recent travel history. Health sector employers and health care workers should refer to [Annex B](#) of the Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee's *Routine Practices and Additional Precautions in all Health Care Settings* document for more information on surveillance for ARIs.

Health care workers who identify patients who screen positive for ARI and have 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 ARI 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 can contact Public Health Ontario

Laboratories' Customer Service Centre at 416-235-6556/ 1-877-604-4567 for advice and support.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (ministry) has developed guidance for the health system on MERS-CoV at www.ontario.ca/novelcoronavirus. This guidance includes case definitions, occupational health & safety and infection prevention & control measures and information on reporting, treatment, laboratory testing, and case & contact management activities.

At this time, the ministry is not changing its case definition for MERS-CoV to include travel to South Korea. The current case definition captures individuals with ARI who have had close contact with a confirmed case of MERS-CoV.

The ministry and Public Health Ontario 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 or to our guidance for the health system.

Health sector employers and health care workers may contact the ministry's Health Care Provider Hotline by email at emergencymanagement.moh@ontario.ca or by phone at 1-866-212-2272 with questions about health system readiness for MERS-CoV.

Original signed by

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