

Guidelines for colleagues and students with Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) infection

MERS is a viral respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus called MERS Coronavirus (MERS-CoV). According to the information from the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health, HKSAR, its mode of transmission is currently uncertain and people may be infected upon exposure to animals, environment or other confirmed patients, such as in a hospital setting. Based on the current limited information, MERS-CoV may be spread from human-to-human through close contact¹. Recent studies indicate that camels served as the primary source of MERS-CoV. The incubation period of MERS-CoV can be up to 14 days. Infected persons can develop acute serious respiratory illness with symptoms including fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. Many also had gastrointestinal symptoms or kidney failure.

If you become ill with symptoms described above, you should put on a facemask and seek medical help immediately. You should inform the doctor of your exposure history, if you have recent history of travel (especially to affected areas with MERS cases) and have contact with animals (especially camels), birds, poultry or sick people, or history of visiting farms, barns or markets with camels.

Inform your Department/Office immediately if you are confirmed positive (or suspected) for MERS. To prevent spreading among the University community, please follow the health advice given by the doctor which may require quarantine if necessary. A sick leave certificate should be obtained for the duration of the illness.

It is also recommended that for those recovered from viral respiratory illness and returning to the campus should wear a facemask for three days and avoid close contact (include sharing of eating utensils) with others as far as practicable.

You are advised to remain vigilant against MERS and take precautionary measures as follows:

- Avoid visiting farms, barns or markets, especially when travelling to areas affected with MERS cases.
- Cover nose and mouth with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose soiled tissue paper properly into a rubbish bin and wash hands with liquid soap and water afterwards.
- Practise good personal hygiene and maintain a clean and healthy environment. Wash hands thoroughly before touching eyes, nose and mouth.
- Build up good body resistance through a balanced diet, regular exercise, adequate rest and do not smoke.
- Avoid crowded places and contact with sick people, wear a facemask when you are required to take care of people with respiratory illness.
- Wear a facemask and seek medical attention immediately if you develop respiratory illness.

For further assistance, please contact the Environmental Health and Safety Section of the Estates Office at 3411 7997 or email ehsu@hkbu.edu.hk.

Environmental Health and Safety Section, Estates Office

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¹ According to the information from the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health, close contact is defined as:

- Anyone who provided care for the patient, including a healthcare worker or family member, or who had other similarly close physical contact;
- Anyone who stayed at the same place (e.g. lived with, visited) as a probable or confirmed case while the case was ill.