

## MIDDLE EAST RESPIRATORY SYNDROME – KEY POINTS

Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) is a viral respiratory disease caused by a coronavirus (MERS-CoV) that was first identified in Saudi Arabia in 2012. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can cause diseases ranging from the common cold to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The virus appears to cause more severe disease in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with such chronic diseases as diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

To date, 25 countries have reported cases, including countries in the Middle East (Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen); in Africa (Algeria, and Tunisia); in Europe (Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Turkey and the United Kingdom); in Asia (China, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia and Philippines); and in North America (the United States of America). However, the vast majority of these cases have so far occurred in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Ships' Masters may wish to print this sheet and post prominently in areas such as the gangway and accommodation.

### WHEN VISITING AFFECTED AREAS

#### KNOW THE SYMPTOMS

##### Early symptoms include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Congestion of the nose and throat
- Pneumonia
- Gastrointestinal symptoms
- Diarrhoea
- Other symptoms suggesting an infection

##### Severe illness can cause:

- Respiratory failure
- Organ failures, especially the kidneys
- Sepsis/shock

#### EDUCATE YOUR CREW

Before arriving at affected countries, ensure the ships' crew are educated and trained in identifying the symptoms. The crew should understand the preventative measures and know what to do in the event of infection or suspected infection.

#### HAVE AN ACTION PLAN

Consider developing a contingency plan that includes infection control procedures such as quarantine arrangements, ensuring infected and non-infected persons do not share toilet and bathing facilities, catering arrangements, sanitising procedures and suitable PPE.

#### ACT IMMEDIATELY

If a crew member exhibits signs of infection seek medical attention immediately and control the spread of infection as per your contingency plan.

#### WHO ADVICE

##### The World Health Organisation (WHO) currently recommends the following precautions:

- Hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene (covering mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing)
- Adhering to good food-safety practices, such as avoiding undercooked meat or food prepared under unsanitary conditions, and properly washing fruits and vegetables before eating them
- Maintaining good personal hygiene.
- The WHO presently does not advise any special screening at points of entry or the application of any travel or trade restrictions.
- WHO FAQ and Guidelines on Infection Prevention and Control can be found at:  
[http://www.who.int/csr/disease/coronavirus\\_infections/faq/en/](http://www.who.int/csr/disease/coronavirus_infections/faq/en/)

#### DON'T TOUCH INFECTED PEOPLE

Do not make direct physical contact with persons infected with MERS-CoV or who are suspected to be infected. MERS-CoV is contagious but only to a limited extent. The virus does not seem to pass easily from person to person unless there is close contact, such as when providing unprotected care to an infected person.

#### DON'T TOUCH ANIMALS

The source of the MERS-CoV is not yet fully clear. A coronavirus very similar to the one found in humans has been isolated from camels in Egypt, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.

#### CONTROL ACCESS TO THE SHIP

Maintain effective ship and gangway security when in affected areas and ensure unauthorised personnel do not board the vessel.

Restrict access into the ship's accommodation – keep doors locked.

Remain vigilant for signs of infection of persons accessing the ship.

BIMCO has produced an *Infectious or Contagious Disease Clause for Voyage and Time Charter Parties* and this can be read at:

[https://www.bimco.org/~media/Chartering/Special\\_Circulars/SC2015\\_03.ashx](https://www.bimco.org/~media/Chartering/Special_Circulars/SC2015_03.ashx)