

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

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Toronto ON M7A 1R3Téléphone: (416) 212-3831  
Télécopieur: (416) 325-8412**May 12, 2014****MEMORANDUM****TO: Health care providers and other health system partners****RE: Recent global increase in MERS-CoV cases**

Dear Colleagues,

Since April 2014, there has been an increase in reported cases of human infection with Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) in the Middle East, with spread to Europe, North Africa, Asia and the United States. So far, all cases have been linked to countries in the Arabian Peninsula.

On May 7, 2014, a team of experts from the WHO completed a 5 day mission to Saudi Arabia to assist the national health authorities to assess the recent increase in the number of people infected in Jeddah. Current evidence does not suggest that a recent increase in the numbers reflects a significant change in the transmissibility of the virus. The upsurge in cases can be explained by an increase, possibly seasonal, in the number of initial cases amplified by several outbreaks in hospitals due to breaches in infection prevention and control measures. According to the WHO, as many as 75% of the recently reported cases appear to be secondary cases, many of whom are health care workers infected within a health care setting.

On May 11, 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced the second imported laboratory-confirmed human case of MERS-CoV in the USA in a traveller who also came to the USA from Saudi Arabia. This person is currently hospitalized and doing well. People who had close contact with this person are being contacted. This case is not linked to the first case identified in the USA on May 2, 2014.

As it is likely that cases will continue to be identified in countries outside of the Middle East, health care providers in Ontario should continue to remain vigilant for MERS-CoV. Health care providers should consider the possibility of MERS-CoV infection in persons with respiratory illness that meet the case definitions outlined in the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's [Guidance for Health Workers and Health Sector Employers on MERS-CoV](#). Health care providers should also ensure they are prepared to apply the enhanced infection prevention and control recommendations as described.

For the latest updates on the MERS-CoV virus, including the total number of cases and deaths, visit the World Health Organization's [Global Alert and Response website](#). In addition, the Ministry maintains a website with information on MERS-CoV for health workers at [www.ontario.ca/novelcoronavirus](http://www.ontario.ca/novelcoronavirus).

Travel health recommendations can be found at the Public Health Agency of Canada's [Travel Health Notice website](#).

As always, the Ministry is available to support health system partners during any urgent situation that may arise and can be reached 24/7 through the Health Care Provider Hotline at 1-866-212-2272.

Yours truly,

*Original signed by*

Arlene King, MD, MHSc, FRCPC  
Chief Medical Officer of Health