

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
Government of India

Advisory for Airlines for flights from Saudi Arabia, Republic of Korea and other MERS-CoV affected countries

1. Brief:

Globally, since September 2012, WHO has notified of 1289 laboratory-confirmed cases of infection with MERS-CoV, including at least 455 related deaths from Middle East countries and other parts of the world till June 15, 2015. The virus appears to be circulating throughout the Arabian Peninsula, primarily in Saudi Arabia, where the majority of cases (>85%) have been reported since 2012. Most people infected with MERS-CoV had severe illness and pneumonia, with around 36% mortality. The virus can spread from person to person through close contact, so pilgrims living and travelling in close quarters may be at risk, even though the risk is considered very low. However, the disease has High mortality and there is no available vaccine or specific treatment for illness. The virus appears to cause more severe disease in older people, people with weakened immune systems, and those with chronic diseases such as cancer, chronic lung disease and diabetes.

Since last month an outbreak of MERS-CoV began in Republic of Korea. There have been 150 confirmed cases of MERS CoV (including 1 confirmed case in China) reported in the current outbreak, with 18 deaths, till 15th June, 2015. World Health Organization and the Republic of Korea's Ministry of Health and Welfare have mentioned this as large and complex outbreak, showing epidemiological pattern similar to previous hospital-associated MERS CoV outbreaks in the Middle East.

MERS-CoV is a zoonotic virus that is transmitted from animals to humans.

In view of the impending Haj pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia and possibility of disease entering India, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India has issued advisories for the Travelers visiting/returning from Saudi Arabia, Republic of Korea and/or any of the other MERS-CoV affected countries.

As a matter of precaution, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India has recommended following measures for airlines (including chartered) involved in operation of direct flights (including transportation of Haj pilgrims) to and from Saudi Arabia, Republic of Korea and / or other MERS-CoV affected countries.

1. In flight announcement as below:

“In view of the current Threat of MERS-CoV, a viral disease which has high mortality and is currently reported in Saudi Arabia, Republic

of Korea and some other countries, all travellers who have any fever, cough, respiratory discomfort or distress during travel should immediately report to the flight crew and should report at the Immigration or medical unit on arrival for basic check up. This is important for early diagnosis for prompt management and preventing spread. ”

2. All airlines should keep a stock of triple layer masks (25 Nos.) hand sanitizer and disposal bags: these are to be used for any passenger reporting with symptoms of MERS-CoV and co-passengers who are likely to have contact.
3. Assist the staff of Health unit at the airport during disembarkation for contact tracing of travelers identified as suspect (who develop fever and/or lower respiratory symptoms).
4. Follow proper aircraft disinfection procedures (as recommended by WHO/ICAO)