

Dear colleagues

The Tennessee Department of Health TDH urges all healthcare providers to ensure that patients are routinely asked about travel history at the point of triage and patient assessment. Such information should not only be elicited, but also be rapidly communicated to all who need to know—including infection control, public health and treating clinicians.

As the outbreak of MERS CoV in Korea illustrates—it is essential to elicit a travel history and rapidly implement appropriate infection control measures. Healthcare facility staff and public health also must work rapidly to fully identify, notify, monitor and quarantine (or isolate) all who had unprotected exposures. In Korea, 122 cases of MERS have been identified (10 deaths). 55 healthcare facilities in Korea have now seen at least one MERS Co-V patient. As of June 11, 3805 exposed person are in quarantine and being monitored.

Within the last month there have been at least 2 occasions where patients who met criteria to be tested for MERS Co-V sought care at Tennessee healthcare facilities, and a travel history was not obtained until days later or a travel history was obtained but not acted upon, resulting in multiple unprotected exposures.

This is a great opportunity for all healthcare institutions to ensure that they have appropriate procedure(s) in place. CDC has updated its infection control guidance emphasizing early identification and minimizing unprotected exposures at point of triage. CDC's updated interim guidance can be found here: <http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/mers/infection-prevention-control.html>. TDH has an interactive resource portal <http://health.state.tn.us/Ceds/ebolaMap.htm> that indicates current disease threats that may impact travelers, with important TDH and CDC resources hyperlinked under each country together with CDC's latest travel warning/advisory.

Please note that TDH has updated its triage and patient assessment guidance for emergency departments and outpatient settings. Korea has been added to the list of countries in the Arabian Peninsula. Please note that in Tennessee, public health requests to be notified about any traveler with exposure to Korea within 14 days of symptom onset, REGARDLESS of healthcare exposure, as there are now reports of the first cases of MERS CoV in Korea that do not appear to be epidemiologically linked (until 6/10, all previous cases were epi-linked to exposures in healthcare settings). The updated triage and patient assessment, a MERS screening form and a MERS CoV specimen requisition form are located in the MERS folder at <https://tnhan.tn.gov/default.aspx>. Call 615 741 7247 for medical consultation and testing approval. Note that TDH staff will consider testing for MERS CoV for all disease (mild, moderate or severe) after consultation. Testing for MERS CoV can be performed at the State public health laboratory in Nashville.

There are no confirmed cases of MERS-CoV cases in Tennessee to date.

Thank you for all that you do in keeping Tennesseans safe.