

Current major event

Asymptomatic cases of MERS

Asymptomatic cases of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) continue to be reported without any understanding of its role in transmission of the virus. So far, since the virus was first detected in April 2012, a total of 202 asymptomatic cases of MERS has been detected (*please see the table*) out of over 1600 laboratory-confirmed cases (over 13%).

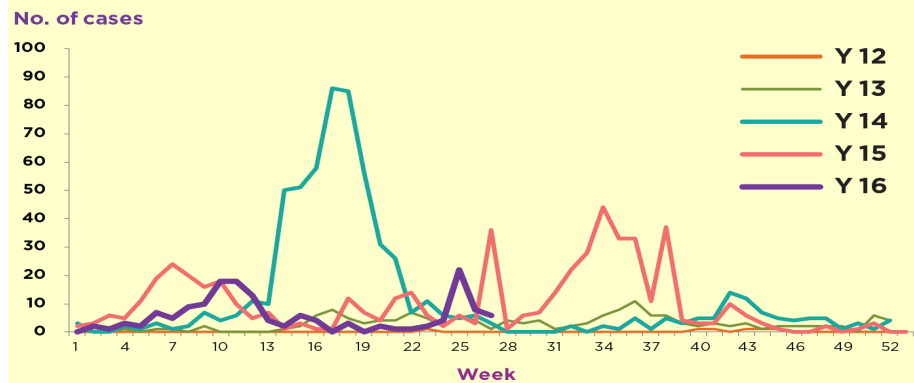
Editorial note

The Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) caused by a novel strain of coronavirus remains a mystery. The virus doesn't cause sustained human-to-human transmission in community settings. However, its behavior in hospital settings under a poor infection control environment remains an enigma. Hospital outbreaks continue to occur from MERS whenever the infection control practices are poor, inadequate or inappropriate.

According to information available, asymptomatic cases of MERS were detected in 2013 (*Please see the table*) largely associated with hospital outbreaks. Today, majority of the cases that are detected as "asymptomatic" are diagnosed following active screening of close contacts of a laboratory-confirmed cases of MERS. Higher number of asymptomatic cases are detected in hospital settings than being associated with community-acquired cases. Majority of these cases have been reported from Saudi Arabia than from any other country.

The fact that these cases do not produce symptoms or show any signs of the clinical features of MERS, but show viral replication, it is difficult to ascertain if they would be responsible for any form of overt or silent transmission. This information is

Laboratory-confirmed cases of MERS reported from 2012-2016



Asymptomatic cases of MERS reported by country, 2013-2016

Country	Year				Total
	2013	2014	2015	2016	
Jordan	-	-	2	2	4
KSA	19	101	36	12	168
Oman	-	-	1	-	1
ROK	-	-	1	-	1
Qatar	-	-	-	1	1
UAE		5	21	1	27
Total	19	106	61	16	202

essential to know when and how their role in onward transmission can be stopped in the event of a sustained community transmission. Today, the MERS coronavirus (MERS-CoV) is not easily transmissible. However, if suddenly the transmission pattern of MERS changes, it could be a SARS-like global health emergency. Before this virus attains this characteristics, it is absolutely important to study and understand the role of asymptomatic cases of MERS. Such information will also help to better understand the infectiousness period of this virus as well as help in applying appropriate quarantine measures for these asymptomatic cases who are often isolated following detection. As MERS keep on surprising us, we need to be ahead of the curve.

Update on outbreaks

in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

MERS-CoV in Saudi Arabia;; Cholera in Somalia.

Current public health events of international concern

[cumulative N° of cases (deaths), CFR %]

Avian Influenza : 2006-2016

Egypt (A/H5N1) [350 (117), 33.4%]
 Egypt (A/H9N2) [3 (0)]

MERS-CoV: 2012-2016

Saudi Arabia [1414 (601), 42.5%]
 Bahrain [1 (1), 100%]

Cholera : 2016

Somalia [8838 (433), 4.9%]

Yellow fever: 2015-2016

Angola [3137 (345), 10.9%]
 DRC [1644 (71), 4.3%]

Lassa fever : 2015-2016

Nigeria [273(149), 54.5%]
 Benin [54(28), 51.8%]

Avian Influenza A (H7N9) : 2013-2016

China [770 (306), 39.7%]

Avian Influenza A (H5N6) : 2016

China [4 (0)]

Wild poliovirus: 2014-2016

Pakistan [371(0)]
 Afghanistan [54(0)]

Zika Virus Infection: 2007-2016

60 countries and territories have reported transmission so far