



## Australian Government

Department of Health  
National Incident Room

### Whole of Government Talking Points MIDDLE EAST RESPIRATORY SYNDROME CORONAVIRUS (MERS)

19 June 2015

(New information included in red)

#### MAIN MESSAGES - TALKING POINTS

- Australia is well prepared for the risk of MERS coming to our shores though the risk at the moment remains low.
- **To date, no cases have been detected in Australia.** The probability of an imported case is not substantially increased by the outbreak in the Republic of Korea (RoK). Transmission occurring in the RoK has been associated with healthcare settings and is not occurring in the broader community.
- As at **17 June 2015**, the RoK has reported **162 confirmed** cases and **19** deaths. Intensive contact tracing is underway.
- **On 18 June 2015, Thai health officials confirmed their first case of MERS in a 75 year old man who had travelled with his family from the Middle East. There have been 20 contacts tested for MERS, all of who have tested negative.**
- The Department of Health continues to closely monitor the situation in the RoK and the Middle East through the WHO and infectious disease surveillance network. **Health has been monitoring** MERS since first reported in 2012.

#### *Australia's preparedness*

- The Australian Government has long standing border **surveillance** measures in place at our international points of entry. These include:
  - A requirement under the *Quarantine Act 1908* for commanders of aircraft **and vessels** coming into Australia from overseas to report any ill travellers/**crew** on board prior to arrival.
  - Assessment of ill travellers presenting at the border by Department of Agriculture officers, with support from state and territory health officials where further clinical assessment is appropriate; and
  - **The** ability to implement disease specific measures, such as mandatory travel history declarations, temperature monitoring, banners, electronic signage and information cards for travellers, as has been done in recent years for Ebola and pandemic influenza.

- Australia's Chief Medical Officer, Professor Chris Baggoley AM, chairs the World Health Organization Emergency Committee on MERS-CoV and remains in touch with senior public health officials around the globe on this issue. Information about MERS is routinely shared by Professor Baggoley with the Chief Health Officers of the states and territories, other members of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC), **key Australian Government agencies** and a wide range of health and medical bodies including relevant medical colleges.
- A National Guideline for the public health management of a case MERS has been published on the Department of Health's website and information on the disease tailored for health care consumers, clinicians, laboratories and GPs is also available on the website at [www.health.gov.au/MERS-coronavirus](http://www.health.gov.au/MERS-coronavirus)
- The Public Health Laboratory Network has advised that laboratory tests are available in Australia to diagnose a MERS- infection if required.
- To raise and maintain awareness of the existence of MERS, the Government has this week put up the MERS specific banners at Australia's international airports for the information of outgoing passengers. Electronic signage has also been implemented at international airports. Over the next week or so, MERS specific information cards will also be given to outgoing travellers. These arrangements will remain in place until the end of October 2015, to cover the period of the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia).
- Temperature monitoring, travel declarations and other enhanced screening measures for incoming passengers are not currently warranted given the assessed risk of MERS.

#### *Travel Advice*

- The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has issued a Smartraveller bulletin on MERS-CoV and country-specific advice for **the RoK and** affected areas of the Middle East. The advice is available from DFAT's website at [www.smartraveller.gov.au](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au)

#### *Visa Arrangements*

- **Australia has one of the best border protection systems in the world. All foreign nationals wishing to travel to Australia require a visa.**
- **As the outbreak in the RoK has been contained and contact tracing and quarantine measures are being undertaken, the existing migration health requirements in place for foreign nationals travelling from the RoK are considered sufficiently robust, with no additional measures required at this time.**
- **The Department of Immigration and Border Protection continues to monitor the situation and is ready to act, should this become necessary.**

**Cleared by: Rob Cameron, AS, Department of Health, 02 6289 8813**

**Media Inquiries: Kay McNiece, Department of Health Media Unit, 026289 7400**

**Consultation: DFAT, PM&C, Defence, Immigration, AG EMA, **Agriculture, & Customs****