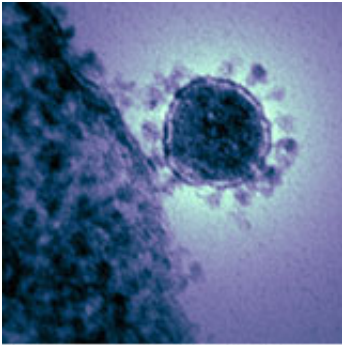


First US MERS patient improving, officials say

May 4 2014, by Dennis Thompson, Healthday Reporter



Microscopic view of MERS.
Photo: National Institute of
Allergy & Infectious Diseases

He had recently been in Saudi Arabia, epicenter of outbreak that has sickened 400 people and killed 93.

(HealthDay)—A man hospitalized in Indiana with the [first U.S. case of a deadly respiratory virus](#) that initially surfaced in the Middle East two years ago is improving, state health officials reported Saturday.

The Indiana Department of Health said in a statement released late Saturday night that the patient remains at Community Hospital in Munster, is in good condition and is "improving each day," the *Associated Press* reported.

The statement also said that no other cases of Middle East Respiratory

Syndrome, or MERS, have been identified, the *AP* said.

The unidentified patient is a health care professional who had been working in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is the epicenter of the viral outbreak of MERS, federal [health officials](#) said Friday.

MERS has sickened hundreds of people in the Middle East, and kills about a quarter of the people who contract the virus, Dr. Anne Schuchat, director of National Center for Immunizations and Respiratory Diseases at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said during a Friday news conference.

Schuchat called the infected man in Indiana "a very low risk to the general public."

In some countries, the virus has spread from person to person through close contact, such as caring for or living with an infected person. But, there's currently no evidence of sustained spread of MERS in general settings, the CDC said.

"The virus has not shown the ability to spread easily in a community setting," Schuchat said.

CDC and Indiana health officials said Friday that they didn't yet know how the man had been infected with the virus, but added that it's very likely that it happened in Saudi Arabia.

Officials also don't know how many people had close contact with the patient, but say there is no evidence at this time that the virus has spread to anyone else.

The man took a plane on April 24 from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, to London, then from London to Chicago. He next took a bus from

Chicago to Indiana. On April 27, he started experiencing "respiratory symptoms," and was admitted to the Indiana hospital the next day, the CDC said.

Because of the patient's symptoms—shortness of breath, coughing and fever—and travel history, Indiana health officials tested for MERS and confirmed the infection Friday afternoon, CDC officials said.

The CDC is working with the airline and the bus company to track down people who may have come in contact with the patient, Schuchat said.

To date, there have been 401 confirmed cases of MERS in 12 countries, but all the cases originated in six countries in the Arabian Peninsula. Ninety-three people have died. Officials don't know where the virus came from or how it spreads. Currently, there is no available vaccine or recommended treatment for the virus, the CDC said.

"In this interconnected world we live in, we expected MERS to make its way to the United States," Dr. Tom Frieden, director of the CDC, said Friday. "We have been preparing since 2012 for this possibility."

People who come down with respiratory illness within 12 weeks of traveling to Saudi Arabia should notify their doctor, Schuchat said. The same goes for someone who becomes ill after contact with a person who has recently traveled to Saudi Arabia.

However, the CDC has not recommended that anyone change their travel plans based on the MERS virus, she said.

Camels have been identified as carriers of MERS, but it's not known how the [virus](#) is being spread to people.

Dr. Debra Spicehandler, an infectious disease expert at Northern

Westchester Hospital in Mount Kisco, N.Y., said, "MERS is very similar to the SARS cases we saw a few years ago. It is dangerous and is associated with [acute respiratory illness](#). It can be spread from person to person in close contact, and there is no treatment for it at this point."

More information: For more on MERS, visit the [World Health Organization](#).

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