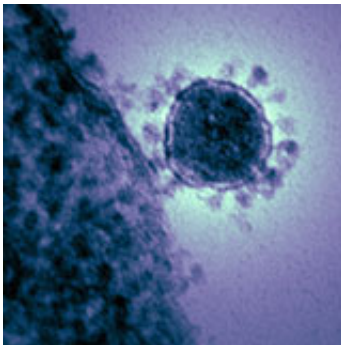


MERS virus doesn't seem to spread easily, study finds

August 27 2014, by Steven Reinberg, Healthday Reporter



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

5 percent chance of getting it, while experts cite a 25 percent chance of catching flu.

(HealthDay)—People infected with the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) virus are unlikely to pass it to others in their household, a new study suggests.

Mostly confined to countries in the Middle East so far, the virus has infected 837 people and killed at least 291, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

"A lot of speculations have been made that MERS spreads significantly among family members and household contacts of active cases," said

study lead researcher Dr. Ziad Memish, Saudi Arabia's assistant deputy minister of health for preventive medicine.

Memish's team studied 26 patients with MERS and their 280 household contacts. The researchers found that 12 people among the 280 household contacts came down with MERS.

According to Memish, that puts the odds of getting MERS from another person at about 5 percent.

"It's reassuring that very low transmission takes place at home among family contacts, and the majority of transmission occurs at health-care facilities," Memish said.

In fact, 25 percent of all MERS cases have been among health-care workers, according to WHO.

The new study's findings were published in the Aug. 28 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Dr. Marc Siegel, an associate professor of medicine at NYU Langone Medical Center in New York City, agreed with the findings, saying, "MERS is not very contagious."

By comparison, the odds of catching the flu from a close contact are 25 percent, Siegel said. "If someone in your household has flu, there's a one in four chance you're going to get it," he said.

With measles, the chances of getting the disease from an infected person in your household are even higher, hitting 90 percent, Siegel said.

"This study shows that the chances of MERS becoming widespread is small," he said.

Siegel added that this low transmission rate has kept the virus largely confined to the Middle East, and the cases seen outside the region have been among people who traveled or worked in that area.

MERS can start with a fever, cough and shortness of breath. Pneumonia is a common complication. Diarrhea has also been reported by some patients, the WHO said.

Severe cases of MERS can cause respiratory failure requiring breathing support in an [intensive care unit](#). Some patients suffer kidney failure or septic shock.

The virus causes more severe disease in people with weakened immune systems, older people and those with such chronic diseases as diabetes, cancer and lung disease, the agency said.

More information: Transmission of MERS-Coronavirus in Household Contacts, *The New England Journal of Medicine*, DOI: 10.1056/NEJMoa1405858

Visit the <http://www.cdc.gov/CORONAVIRUS/MERS/> [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) for more on the MERS virus.

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Citation: MERS virus doesn't seem to spread easily, study finds (2014, August 27) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-08-mers-virus-doesnt-easily.html>

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