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CDC reports first U.S. case of MERS

The first U.S. case of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) has been reported in Indiana, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

While the MERS virus is of great concern because of its virulence, the U.S. case “represents a very low risk to the broader general public,” said Anne Schuchat, M.D., director of the CDC National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, in a CDC telebriefing held May 2.

The patient, who is in stable condition in an Indiana hospital, is a health care provider who traveled from Saudi Arabia on April 24, flying from Riyadh to London to Chicago, and then by bus to Indiana before being hospitalized April 28.

“In this interconnected world we live, we expected this . . . to (eventually) occur in the United States, and we are prepared,” said Dr. Schuchat. “It’s another reminder that diseases are just a plane ride away.”

The CDC is working closely with the Indiana State Department of Health, as well as other agencies to identify anyone who may have had close contact with the patient. In addition, the CDC and the World Health Organization are collaborating as part of an ongoing public health investigation.

To date, 262 people in 12 countries are confirmed to have MERS infection, and 93 have died. The virus, new to humans, first was

reported in the Arabian Peninsula in 2012. All of the cases have been linked to six countries in or near the Arabian Peninsula.

Health care providers should remain vigilant, said Dr. Schuchat. While children as young as 2 years old have been infected with MERS, the median age is 51. General precautions include frequent hand-washing, and avoiding touching eyes, nose and mouth if hands are not clean, and avoiding close contact with sick individuals.

Health care professionals should evaluate patients for MERS-CoV infection if they develop fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as cough or shortness of breath, within 14 days after traveling from countries in or near the Arabian Peninsula. They also should evaluate patients for MERS-CoV infection if they have had close contact with a symptomatic recent traveler from this area who has fever and acute respiratory illness.

When evaluating infants, children or adults with respiratory symptoms associated with fever, a good travel history is essential, Dr. Schuchat said.

For more information, visit the CDC web page at <http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/MERS/>. The Indiana State Department of Health has guidance at <http://www.in.gov/isdh/25796.htm>.