

## EDITORIAL

# MIDDLE EAST RESPIRATORY SYNDROME CORONAVIRUS A GLOBAL THREAT?

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Acute Respiratory infections or ARIs, are a group of diseases that impose an enormous burden on vulnerable population around the world yet they have rarely risen to the top of the global health priority list. Respiratory tract infections are also the source of most antibiotic use and abuse.<sup>1</sup>

Acute respiratory infections describes three major ARIs- Pneumonia, influenza and Respiratory Syncytial Virus Infections as well as the emerging infections that loom as further threats.

Last Decade has seen the out breaks of SARS, Avian Flu H5N1 and swine Flu.<sup>2 3</sup>

The Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-Cov) is a novel coronavirus (nCoV) first reported on 24 September 2012 by Egyptian Virologist Dr. Ali Mohamed Zaki in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. He isolated and identified a previously unknown coronavirus from the lungs of a 60- Year-old male patient with acute pneumonia and acute renal failure.<sup>4</sup>

It is particular strain of the “coronavirus” family that causes illnesses ranging from the common cold to more serious respiratory conditions. It is regarded as a cousin of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which claimed more than 700 lives when it hit Asia in 2002-2003.

How widespread in MERS-Cov no one is really sure. It is possibly being under-reported because doctors are mistaking it for the common cold and people who are otherwise healthy are able to fight it off. While the World health organization (WHO) is taking MERS-Cov seriously.

The symptoms are very similar to the common cold, though in the case of infection, they will rapidly escalate from fever and cough to breathing difficulties. Many patients have also had gastrointestinal symptoms, including diarrhea, and some have had kidney failure, and in extreme cases, death.

No vaccine is currently available. Treatment depends on the patient’s clinical condition and would involve general supportive medical attention. In advanced cases, patients have been submitted to intensive care units to support their breathing and organ functions.

Until more is known about where MERS-Cov comes from and how it is spread, it is hard to give specific advice. The US Centers for Disease Control and prevention (CDC) recommends general common sense hygiene precautions. These include: washing your hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds, and if water is not available to use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer;

Covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze; avoiding touching your eyes, nose or sharing eating utensils, with sick people; and cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces, Such as toys and doorknobs.

Unfortunately far less funding is dedicated to ARIs than HIV/ AIDS or malaria relative to their global burden<sup>5</sup>. There is much that should be done. Environmental conditions can foster ARIs. Poverty, malnutrition, air pollution, Tobacco and overcrowding allow pathogen to flourish while improved standards of living can vanquish many of them. Until these issues are clarified it is likely to remain a global threat.

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