1 October 2014 - The seventh meeting of the Emergency Committee (EC) convened by the Director-General under the International Health Regulations (IHR) [IHR 2005] regarding the Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) was conducted with members and advisors of the Emergency Committee through electronic correspondence from 26 September 2014 through 30 September 2014. [1]

The WHO Secretariat provided an update on and assessment of epidemiological and scientific developments, including a description of recently reported cases and transmission patterns. Iran and Saudi Arabia provided an update on and assessment of MERS-CoV, including progress towards implementation of the Emergency Committee's temporary recommendations. [2]

The Committee noted that: (i) there have been significant efforts made to strengthen infection prevention and control measures, with an epidemiological situation that has not changed since the 6th meeting of the IHR EC; (ii) the number of cases has fallen since the April upswing, and cases continues to appear sporadically with no evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission in communities; (iii) although transmission in health care settings is still occurring in small clusters, transmission seems generally contained; (iv) activities conducted to reduce the international spread of MERS-CoV seem to be effective; and (v) the current data suggest that MERS-CoV transmission could be seasonal, with an upsurge expected next spring.

The Committee reiterated that its previous advice remains relevant and that significant efforts should be made to:

- continue to strengthen infection prevention control (IPC) practices, build capacity of heath care workers and provide protective equipment in vulnerable countries, especially African countries;
- improve awareness about MERS-CoV among pilgrims going for Hajj, and conduct surveillance for MER-CoV among pilgrims during and after Hajj;
- harmonise laboratory testing algorithms;
- reinforce epidemiological surveillance in camels in the Middle East and in Africa, as well as surveillance in humans and address critical gaps in knowledge of human and animal transmission.

The Committee unanimously concluded that the conditions for a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) have not yet been met.

Based on the Committee's advice, and information currently available, the Director-General accepted the Committee's assessment. She thanked the Committee for its work.

The WHO Secretariat will continue to provide regular updates to the Committee Members and Advisors. The Emergency Committee will be reconvened in three months, or earlier if circumstances require.