

# **Impact of MERS-CoV infection on the perception of large hospitals and small clinics: The case of Korean mothers with preschool-aged children**

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## **Abstract**

The recent MERS-CoV epidemic in Korea has again highlighted the potential devastation a powerful virus can bring to an unprepared society. Reports seem to indicate that, when the first case of MERS-CoV was suspected, there was an insufficient sense of urgency as well as only a superficial understanding of appropriate emergency measures. As a result, the epidemic caused widespread fear and anxiety among citizens across the whole country. One particularly troubling behavioral pattern noted during the epidemic was people's avoidance of hospitals and clinics for fear of contracting the disease. That is, the epicenter of the recent MERS-CoV epidemic was in two major hospitals in Korea, and many became infected visiting these medical facilities. As a result, large numbers of parents, particularly those with small children, were observed to avoid medical facilities. This is noteworthy in that healthcare needs should be met regardless of whether there is an epidemic and any avoidance of medical facilities during an epidemic can have a consequence more serious than the epidemic itself. Because of serious consequences of avoiding medical facilities during an epidemic, this study investigates how parents with small children can be persuaded to not avoid visiting medical facilities during an epidemic in the future. In addition, the study examines any difference in preferences for large hospitals and small clinics as a result of the epidemic because large hospitals have been identified as the epicenter of the epidemic. The results should shed some light on how medical facilities can more effectively reassure parents during an epidemic. This study is based on a survey of Korean mothers with preschool-aged children because mothers are much more likely than fathers to take their children to hospitals and clinics in Korea. The respondents were more likely to prefer small clinics during an epidemic and reported a well-designed staff protocol during an epidemic as the most important factor, followed by a well-trained staff, a state-of-the-art screening system for fatal infection, and openness and honesty in communication by staff, in that order.

**Keywords:** MERS-CoV Infection, Perception of Large Hospitals and Small Clinics, Mothers with Preschool-Aged Children, Korea