At the end of January 2018, a total of 2160 laboratory-confirmed cases of Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), including 773 associated deaths (case–fatality rate: 35.8%) were reported globally; the majority of these cases were reported from Saudi Arabia (1786 laboratory-confirmed cases, including 699 related deaths with a case–fatality rate of 39.1%).

During the month of January, 25 laboratory-confirmed cases of MERS were reported in Saudi Arabia including 8 associated deaths. A nosocomial outbreak of MERS occurred in a private hospital in Hafr Albatin region, the date of onset of the first case was 23 January 2018; while on 4 February 2018, three asymptomatic healthcare workers were reported through contact tracing.

The demographic and epidemiological characteristics of the cases reported in January 2018 do not show any significant difference compared with cases reported during the same period from 2012 to 2017. Owing to improved infection prevention and control practices in the hospitals, the number of hospital-acquired cases of MERS has dropped significantly in 2015, 2016 and 2017 compared to previous years.

The age group of those aged 50–59 years continues to be the group at highest risk for acquiring infection as primary cases. For secondary cases, it is the age group of 30–39 years who are mostly at risk. The number of deaths is higher in the age group of 50–59 years for primary cases and 70–79 years for secondary cases.