Middle East Respiratory Syndrome: Readability of Online Resources

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Aim
Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) is a fatal disease that had several outbreaks over the past few years. With each outbreak, a large number of people try to get quality information about the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of this disease from online resources. However, the readability of health related websites has been a concern as they are not always being easily understood by ordinary users. The aim of this study was to evaluate the readability of the most likely visited websites containing information on MERS.

Methods
This cross-sectional study was performed in May 2017. We searched Google, Yahoo and Bing using the keyword ‘MERS’. The readability of the first three pages for each search engine was evaluated using Flesch-Kincaid and Flesch Reading Ease tests. The Kruskal-Wallis test was used to identify readability differences between the websites that were returned by the search engines.

Results
The average readability score was at the College grade reading level. The current sample grade level exceeds recommended readability according to the best practices. No significant difference in Flesch Reading Ease (P-Value =0.666) and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level (P-Value =0.415) was observed between the web pages of different domains using The Kruskal-Wallis test.

Conclusion
The readability test revealed that most MERS-related websites were too complex for the general public to understand. This finding indicates that the general public may struggle to fully comprehend most of the readily available Internet information on MERS. Internet information on MERS is poorly written and we suggest that Webpages providing information must be made more readable. Furthermore, Health professionals should recommend Web sites that are easy to read.

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