

EBOLA OUTBREAK

FAQs

1. What is Ebola?

It is a disease caused by a virus which is thought to come from bats. It causes a severe and life-threatening illness with a fatality rate of between 50-90%.

2. What do I need to know about the current outbreak?

It started in Guinea and has spread to several countries in West Africa including Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Liberia. There are now a total of 1711 confirmed and suspected cases of Ebola in these countries. The virus causing this has spread over wide areas, compared to previous outbreaks.

3. How is Ebola spread?

Ebola is spread as a result of human to human contact. That means direct contact with bodily fluids of an infected person (blood, stool, urine, saliva, semen).

This also includes direct contact with e.g. soiled clothing or bed linen, objects, utensils, toilets, basins and used needles from an infected person.

4. How do I know if I or someone I know has Ebola?

The initial symptoms are:

- sudden onset fever
- intense weakness
- muscle and joint pain
- headache
- sore throat
- stomach pain
- loss of appetite
- cough (may cough up blood)

Later on, patients develop:

- vomiting, which may contain blood
- diarrhoea, which may contain blood
- rash
- red eyes
- impaired kidney and liver function
- bleeding from nose or mouth
- internal and/or external bleeding

If you are concerned about having any of these symptoms or that you may have been in contact with someone else who has these symptoms or who may be infected then seek medical attention.

When a person becomes infected, they may not show any symptoms for anywhere between 2 to 21 days (the incubation period). They are not contagious until they show symptoms.

The diagnosis of Ebola is confirmed through laboratory blood tests.

5. Am I at risk?

The following groups are considered to be at risk:

- health workers in affected countries, especially those dealing with confirmed or suspected Ebola cases
- family members and colleagues of infected people
- those in contact with mourners of those who have died of Ebola
- close personal contact with an infected person, or consuming contaminated food or water

6. How do I stop myself from catching Ebola?

Unfortunately there is no vaccine for Ebola, so the best way to protect yourself is AT ALL TIMES to maintain good personal hygiene. In addition follow the preventative measures below:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water or alcohol as frequently as possible.
- Do not share personal items.
- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing.

- Avoid contact with high risk animals (fruit bats, monkeys, apes).
- Cook meat thoroughly before eating and avoid eating bush meat including bats and monkeys.
- Avoid visiting hospitals in affected countries.
- Avoid shore leave in areas affected by outbreak.
- Avoid close contact with locals in affected areas (this includes sexual intercourse).
- Avoid any contact with those who may be showing symptoms.
- Report symptoms (especially fever) at an early stage and encourage anyone showing symptoms to seek medical attention as soon as possible.
- Isolate anyone showing symptoms. Those attending to this person should wear appropriate protective clothing and adhere to strict infection control guidelines.
- Avoid contact with infected persons.
- Avoid touching bodily fluids of people who have been infected (blood, stool, urine, saliva, semen).
- Do not attend burials of people infected. Avoid washing, touching or kissing dead bodies.

7. What happens if I fall ill ?

In the event of a suspected Ebola case on board a vessel, immediate Radio Medical advice should be obtained.

- Developing symptoms while on board ship

If you develop symptoms listed above while on board ship, and if you have visited an area in the current outbreak area and within the incubation period of Ebola virus then you will need to be isolated from others on board the ship and off-loaded into hospital at the next port or sooner if helicopter evacuation is available. In some cases this will

mean diverting to the next port rather than onwards to the next scheduled port-of-call.

- Caring for someone with suspected Ebola on board ship

Suspected case(s) should ONLY be attended to by other crew members who are fully protected by wearing disposable gowns, disposable gloves, masks and, if they are within one meter, goggles. These should be disposed of in a container which allows no breach eg plastic bags which can be zipped. If needles are needed to give injections then they should be disposed of in a sterile container.

Crew members attending the patient should wash their hands well with soap and water or alcohol after attending the patient. The number of crew members attending the patient should be minimized.

All ships visiting outbreak areas should have a supply of masks, gowns, gloves and goggles.

After the patient has been transferred off the ship to hospital the sick-bay should be thoroughly cleaned with disinfectant. The person(s) doing the cleaning should wear full protective equipment including goggles.

It would be prudent to quarantine all people in close contact with the patient and this will mean removing them from the ship. It is not necessary to quarantine other crew and officers unless the patient is confirmed to have Ebola virus in which case the whole crew and officers should be quarantined and replaced. If the patient is confirmed to have Ebola then the whole ship should be fumigated before the new crew and officers arrive.

- Developing symptoms while on leave at home?

If you develop symptoms while at home on leave you must not be cared for at home as you may put your family members at risk. You will need to be admitted to a special hospital unit.

Once you recover, you should not return home until advised to do so by medical professionals.

Sexual intercourse should be avoided for 7 weeks after recovery as the virus can be spread via semen.

8. What is the treatment for Ebola?

There is no cure for Ebola, although experimental treatments are being tried. Treatment is mainly supportive and may include intensive care support in severe cases.

Unfortunately most people with Ebola die. It is fatal in 50-90% of patients.

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