



EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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What is Ebola?

Ebola virus is the cause of a viral haemorrhagic fever. The virus originated in the Central African rainforest and is thought to have spread to humans by handling or butchering of infected animals such as monkeys, gorillas, chimpanzees, forest antelope, porcupines or bats.

What are the symptoms of Ebola virus?

An infected person will typically develop symptoms such as fever, headache, joint and muscle pain, sore throat, and intense muscle weakness. These symptoms start suddenly 2 to 21 days after becoming infected, although 8 to 10 days is more common for symptom onset.

Additional symptoms include diarrhoea, vomiting, a rash, chest and abdominal pain, severe weight loss and impaired kidney and liver function. The infected person may bleed internally, as well as from the ears, eyes and mouth.

Symptoms of Ebola virus disease are similar to those of other viral haemorrhagic fevers, such as Marburg, and of infectious diseases like malaria or typhoid. Diagnosis can be difficult, especially if only a single case is involved.

Some people who become infected with the Ebola virus are able to recover. However, the World Health Organization, reports that up to 90% of those infected with the Ebola virus will die.

How is the Ebola virus transmitted?

People can become infected with the Ebola virus if they come into contact with the blood, bodily secretions or organs of an infected person or animal.

Some traditional African burial rituals may have played a part in its spread. The Ebola virus can survive for several days outside the body, including on the skin of an infected person.

Other ways people can catch the virus include:

- Touching the soiled clothing of an infected person and then touching their mouth;

- Having sex with an infected person without using a condom (the virus can be present in semen for several weeks, possibly as many as seven, after an infected person has recovered);
- Handling unsterilised needles or medical equipment that have been used on an infected person;
- Not wearing appropriate protective equipment such as masks, gowns and gloves in the healthcare setting;
- Handling infected animals or coming into contact with their body fluids.

A person is infectious as long as their blood and secretions contain the virus.

Ebola virus is generally not spread through routine social contact such as shaking hands with patients without symptoms. It is also not spread through food or water.

Who is at risk from Ebola?

Anyone who has close contact with an infected person or handles samples from patients is at risk of becoming infected. Hospital workers, laboratory workers and family members caring for patients are at greatest risk.

How is Ebola diagnosed?

Ebola is diagnosed based on travel history, symptoms and laboratory testing.

Samples of blood or body fluid can be sent to a laboratory equipped to perform testing for the presence of Ebola virus.

What treatment is available for Ebola?

There is currently no specific treatment or cure for Ebola virus disease, although potential new vaccines and drug therapies are being developed and tested.

Patients need to be treated in strict isolation in intensive care to prevent the infection from spreading, and to care for their symptoms:

- Dehydration is common, so fluids may be given intravenously (directly into a vein);
- Blood oxygen levels and blood pressure need to be maintained at the correct level;
- Replacement of lost blood and clotting factors.

What is the risk of Ebola in the Caribbean?

Based on available information, the risk to the Caribbean is considered to be very low at this time, and there have been no reported cases.

While it is theoretically possible that someone with the virus could arrive in the Caribbean, health professionals have been told to be alert for any patient presenting with unusual symptoms, and a travel history to an affected area.

If such a person were identified, the person would be quickly admitted to hospital and quarantined.

What is the risk of catching Ebola during air travel?

You cannot catch Ebola by travelling on a plane with someone who is infected, unless you come into very close physical contact with them, such as kissing.

Individuals who are not symptomatic are not contagious.

Ebola virus is not a respiratory disease like influenza ('flu) and is not transmitted through the air.

Are ill passengers in West Africa getting on planes?

According to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC), airports in Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone are screening all outbound passengers for Ebola symptoms, including fever. Passengers are also required to complete a health questionnaire.

What is CARPHA doing to protect the region?

The Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), the body responsible for public health in the Caribbean, has informed Member States about the situation in West Africa and asked that they inform health professionals to be vigilant for unusual illnesses in people who have visited the affected area.

CARPHA has conducted a risk assessment, and will continue to assess the risk of Ebola in the Caribbean on an ongoing basis. The Agency is providing information on its website for health professionals and the public.

CARPHA is also working closely with its regional and international partners, including PAHO/WHO, to monitor the situation and will keep the health authorities of Member States apprised of major changes.

What do you do if you become ill?

Call or visit a healthcare provider immediately if:

- You or anyone in your household has travelled to an area where there is a confirmed Ebola virus outbreak, and;
- You or anyone in your household are showing some or all of the symptoms of Ebola virus disease.

Describe your symptoms over the phone, inform the healthcare provider of your travel history and activities carried out while in the affected area. This is so that they can prepare for your arrival, and see you safely without potentially exposing themselves or others to the virus.

The sooner you receive treatment, the better your chances of recovery.

Can I take care of an ill relative at home, if it is likely that they have Ebola virus disease?

No. Home care is NOT recommended for Ebola patients. The risk of spread in a household setting is extremely high. The management of Ebola virus disease requires infection control measures and medical intervention that cannot be provided in a home-care setting. All suspected cases of Ebola should be referred to a hospital for appropriate management.