



Information for humanitarian aid workers: Ebola virus disease

Interim Guidance for Humanitarian Workers

Anyone planning to conduct humanitarian work in areas of Africa where outbreaks of Ebola virus disease are known to occur needs to be familiar with how Ebola virus is transmitted.

Ebola virus is introduced into the human population through close contact with the blood, secretions, organs or other bodily fluids of infected animals. In Africa, infection has occurred through the handling of infected chimpanzees, gorillas, fruit bats, monkeys, forest antelope and porcupines found ill or dead or in the rainforest. It is important to reduce contact with high-risk animals (ie fruit bats, monkeys or apes) including not picking up dead animals found lying in the forest or handling their raw meat.

Once a person comes into contact with an animal that has Ebola and is infected by the virus, it can spread from human to human. Infection occurs from direct contact (through broken skin or mucous membranes) with the blood, or other bodily fluids or secretions (stool, urine, saliva, semen) of infected people. Semen can contain virus for some weeks after apparent recovery from the illness. Infection can also occur if broken skin or mucous membranes of a healthy person come into contact with environments that have become contaminated with an Ebola patient's infectious fluids such as soiled clothing, bed linen, or used needles.

Anyone who has close contact with a person infected with the virus, or someone who handles samples from patients is at risk. This includes hospital staff, family members and laboratory workers, all of whom are at risk if they do not use proper barrier nursing techniques. These precautions include wearing protective gowns, gloves, and masks, in addition to wearing eye protection (eg eye glasses) or a face shield.

Infection generally does not occur through routine, social contact (such as shaking hands) with asymptomatic individuals. The likelihood of contracting any viral hemorrhagic fever (VHF), including Ebola, is considered very low unless there has been travel to a known affected area and direct contact with the blood or body fluids (eg, saliva, urine) of symptomatic infected persons or animals, or objects that have been contaminated with body fluids. The cause of fever in persons who have travelled in areas where VHF is present is more likely to be a common infectious disease, but such persons should be evaluated by a health-care provider to be sure.

Recommendations

If you travel to an area affected by a VHF outbreak, the following precautions are recommended:

Before you leave

- assemble a travel health kit containing basic first aid and medical supplies. Be sure to include a thermometer, household disinfectant, alcohol-based hand rubs for hand hygiene. In addition, you should include a supply of surgical masks and disposable gloves if your agency does not provide them and you may be in situations where you have close contact with persons suspected of having a VHF infection.
- inform yourself and others who may be travelling with you about Ebola virus. This includes obtaining and remaining aware of up-to-date, reliable information on the specific areas affected, as these may change over time. For information about these illnesses, see links below.
- be sure you are up to date with all your immunisations, and see your health-care provider at least 4-6 weeks before travel to get any additional immunisations, medications, or information you may need.
<http://www.nathnac.org/>
- check your travel insurance plan or get additional insurance that covers medical evacuation in the event of illness.
- identify in-country health-care resources in advance of your trip

While you are in an area where Ebola virus disease has been reported:

Maintain the **basic precautions** that would apply in all humanitarian situations. This includes:

- avoiding contact with ill or dead animals (especially primates and bats) as well as consumption of "bushmeat" (wild animals, including primates, sold in local markets for consumption as food)
- adhering to safe sex practices including the use of barrier contraception

If you are involved in medical care you should maintain the **general principles of infection control**, including:

- sterilisation and proper disposal of needles and equipment
- proper disposal of body fluids, tissues and patient excretions
- careful and frequent handwashing using soap and water (or waterless alcohol-based hand rubs when soap is not available).
- wearing gloves

In addition, you should observe **barrier techniques** when in close contact with persons or animals suspected or known to have Ebola virus infection. This includes wearing protective gowns, gloves, masks and eye protection or face shields:

- when wearing disposable gloves, wash the gloves with soap and water before removing them.
- do not reuse the gloves; instead dispose of them according to recommended infection control precautions.
- after disposing of the gloves, wash your hands again

If you think you have Ebola virus infection or symptoms compatible with Ebola virus disease:

Whilst in the affected area, if you or your family members develop fever or other symptoms such as chills, muscle aches, nausea, vomiting, or rash:

- visit a health-care provider immediately and inform them that you may have had contact with Ebola virus disease. The nearest Embassy or Consular Office can help you find a provider in the area, and you are encouraged to identify these resources in advance.
- when travelling to a health-care provider, limit your contact with others. All other travel should be avoided.
- remember that other potential causes of the illness (such as malaria) should not be overlooked

After your return

Persons returning from an affected area who have had a potential exposure to Ebola virus disease should monitor their health for 21 days post exposure. Any person who becomes ill, even if only a fever, should consult a health-care provider immediately and tell him or her about their recent travel and potential contacts.

Additional Information

For more information about health recommendations for travel to Africa, see:
<http://www.nathnac.org/>

For more information about Ebola virus disease, see:
<http://www.hpa.org.uk/Topics/InfectiousDiseases/InfectionsAZ/Ebola/>

For information about other viral hemorrhagic fevers see:
<http://www.hpa.org.uk/Topics/InfectiousDiseases/InfectionsAZ/ViralHaemorrhagicFever/>

For health-care workers working with VHF patients in African healthcare settings, see WHO's "Interim Infection Control Recommendations for Care of Patients with Suspected or Confirmed Filovirus (Ebola, Marburg) Haemorrhagic Fever"
http://www.who.int/csr/bioriskreduction/interim_recommendations_filovirus.pdf?ua=1

First published: July 2014

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