

Questions & answers for MOHS clients re the Ebola virus

IMPORTANT NOTICE: This Q&A has been compiled using the latest information available from health authorities including the World Health Organisation. The WHO states there is currently no licensed medicine or vaccine for Ebola virus disease, but several products are under development. MOHS is monitoring the virus outbreak constantly and will provide regular updates.

Q1. What advice should I give to employees concerned about the risk of Ebola?

A: To date, the Ebola virus has not been detected in the UK so the risk of catching it in this country is very low – unless the employee has visited one of the affected countries or has come into contact with someone who has recently visited one of these countries.

Q2. What countries are currently affected?

A: The virus is prevalent in the following West African countries – Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Two other African countries, Nigeria and Senegal, have also had outbreaks but these have so far been contained. Low case outbreaks have also occurred in USA and Spain.

Q3. What advice should be given to employees who think they may have contracted Ebola?

A: If an employee has returned from one of the affected countries or has been in contact with anyone from these areas, they need to be aware of the symptoms and also the incubation period (please refer to Q4 for more information about symptoms and incubation period).

If the employee is presenting (ie showing) any of the symptoms listed in Q4, they either need to stay at home and call 111 (the NHS helpline) or their own GP where they will receive instructions. They should not attempt to come into work or to visit their GP surgery or any other medical centre.

If the employee is presenting symptoms at work, they should be advised to go home **immediately** and call 111 (the NHS helpline) or their own GP surgery and await instructions. It is also advisable for the employee to avoid contact with family and friends while they wait for medical intervention.

Q4. Should their workstation be quarantined off?

A: As the virus is spread by contact with body fluids and blood from infected persons, effective infection control procedures such as environmental surface disinfection (ie via wipes and sprays) and hand hygiene (ie antibacterial hand sanitisers) are crucial to help prevent Ebola virus contamination. There are a number of reputable suppliers currently offering products that target the Ebola virus.

Q5. What are the symptoms of Ebola?

A: Typical symptoms are:

- sudden onset of fever (high temperature, feeling flushed, sweaty or clammy)
- intense weakness
- muscle pain
- headaches and sore throats

These symptoms can be followed by vomiting, diarrhoea, a rash, impaired kidney and liver function, and in some cases, both internal and external bleeding.

The incubation period from infection to onset of symptoms, is from two to 21 days. Those infected become contagious once they begin to show symptoms.

NB: People are not contagious during the incubation period.

Q6. Should employers introduce screening procedures to try and monitor the virus?

A: At the present time, there is no appropriate screening procedure for Ebola, given the 2 – 21 day incubation period and the fact that people may not be totally accurate when questioned about their recent health history. In addition, taking painkillers may also lower temperatures.

The main concern for employers should be whether the employee has recently returned from one of the affected West African countries or if they have been in contact with someone who has been there.

Q7. Are there any other preventative measures employers can take?

A: MOHS has produced a fact sheet on Ebola which can be distributed to employees to help them understand the nature of the virus and how it is contracted and spread.

The symptoms of the Ebola virus are very similar to the flu virus so it may be worthwhile offering all employees a flu vaccination to prevent them getting the flu, the symptoms of which they may mistaken for Ebola symptoms.

Disclaimer: this fact sheet has been compiled for guidance only. MOHS cannot accept any responsibility should an employee become infected with Ebola. It is in the client's best interests to remain vigilant about the disease and to take every precaution to protect its workforce. Your sickness absence policy may need to be updated to include company procedure for dealing with an outbreak of Ebola in the workplace.

For further information, email info@mohs.co.uk, visit mohs.co.uk or call 0121 601 4041