

## **Ebola virus disease**

### **What is it?**

The Ebola virus disease (formerly known as Ebola haemorrhagic fever) is a severe, often fatal illness, with a fatality rate of up to 90%. It is one of the world's most virulent diseases.

### **How can you catch it?**

Ebola is spread by close contact. It is unlikely that you will catch Ebola by being near someone who is affected or, for example, by being on the same aircraft. The Ebola virus doesn't travel through the air like flu and other respiratory diseases.

To catch Ebola, you have to have direct contact with the bodily fluids (eg saliva, sweat, blood and vomit) of someone infected with it – whether they are alive or dead.

Infection can also occur if the 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, used needles or other inanimate objects contaminated with those bodily fluids. After that, the virus could get into your body by touching foods and eating it.

Eating or handling infected bush meat (ie fruit bats, monkeys or apes) can also cause infection.

### **Signs and Symptoms**

Typical signs and symptoms are:

- sudden onset of fever
- 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.

Ebola virus disease infections can only be confirmed through laboratory testing.

### **What is the treatment?**

Currently, there is no vaccine.

## How to limit your risk of catching it

There are currently no reported cases of people being infected while in the UK so coming into contact with the disease is unlikely.

However, if you have recently travelled to an area that has been affected, such as Liberia, Guinea or Sierra Leone, or have come into contact with someone who may be at risk, there are several ways of limiting your chance of catching Ebola.

Despite the seriousness of the disease, preventing it spreading is relatively simple. According to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, it is important to wash your hands thoroughly with warm water and soap or a hand sanitizer can be used.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) says people should avoid any contact with someone they believe is infected, especially with their bodily fluids, and advises that if you need to go near someone with the virus, use protective gear such as face masks and gloves.

## What to do if you suspect you or an employee has contracted the disease?

If you or one of your employees have been in an area known to have Ebola virus disease or in contact with a person known or suspected to have Ebola and begins to present symptoms, they should stay at home, isolate themselves from family and friends and call 111 (NHS helpline) or their own GP where they will receive instructions.

The latest advice is that they should not attempt to visit their GP surgery or other medical centre.

Prompt medical care is essential to improving the rate of survival from the disease. It is also important to control spread of the disease and infection control procedures need to be started immediately.

## Is it safe to travel during an outbreak?

The risk of infection for travellers is very low since person-to-person transmission results from direct contact with the body fluids or secretions of an infected patient.

## World Health Organisation (WHO) general travel advice

- Travellers should avoid all contact with infected people
- Health workers travelling to affected areas should strictly follow WHO recommended infection control guidance.
- Anyone who has stayed in areas where cases were recently reported should be aware of the symptoms of infection and seek medical attention at the first sign of illness.
- Clinicians caring for travellers returning from affected areas with compatible symptoms are advised to consider the possibility of Ebola virus disease

For further information, email [info@mohs.co.uk](mailto:info@mohs.co.uk), visit [mohs.co.uk](http://mohs.co.uk) or call 0121 601 4041