

Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) GENERAL FAQ

Source: World Health Organization fact sheet (September 2014)

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs103/en/>

1. What is the Ebola virus disease?

Ebola virus disease (EVD), formerly known as Ebola haemorrhagic fever, is a severe, often fatal illness, with a death rate of up to 90%. The illness affects humans and nonhuman primates (monkeys, gorillas, and chimpanzees). Ebola first appeared in 1976 in two simultaneous outbreaks, one in a village near the Ebola River in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the other in a remote area of Sudan. The origin of the virus is unknown but fruit bats (Pteropodidae) are considered the likely host of the Ebola virus, based on available evidence

2. How do people become infected with the disease?

In the current outbreak in West Africa, the majority of cases in humans have occurred as a result of human-to-human transmission. Infection occurs from direct contact through broken skin or mucous membranes with the blood, bodily fluids, or secretions (stool, urine, saliva, semen) of infected people.

Infection can also occur if broken skin or mucous membranes of a healthy person come into contact with environments/objects that have become contaminated with an Ebola patient's infectious fluids such as soiled clothing, bed linen, or used needles.

3. Who is most at risk?

During an outbreak, those at higher risk of infection are: health workers; family members or others in close contact with infected people; mourners who have direct contact with the bodies of the deceased as part of burial ceremonies.

Exposure to the virus can be controlled through the use of protective measures in clinics and hospitals, at community gatherings, or at home.

4. What are some of the symptoms of EVD?

Sudden onset of fever, intense weakness, muscle pain, headache and sore throat are typical signs and symptoms. This is followed by vomiting, diarrhea, rash, impaired kidney and liver function, and in some cases, both internal and external bleeding.

The incubation period, or the time interval from infection to onset of symptoms, is from two to 21 days. The patients become contagious once they begin to show symptoms. They are not contagious during the incubation period. EVD infections can only be confirmed through laboratory testing.

5. When should someone seek medical care?

If a person has been in an area known to have EVD or in contact with a person known or suspected to have EVD and they begin to have symptoms, they should seek medical care immediately.

Any cases of persons who are suspected to have the disease should be reported to the nearest health unit immediately. 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.

6. What is the treatment?

Currently, there is no licensed medicine or vaccine for EVD, but several products are under development.

Severely ill patients require intensive supportive care. They are frequently dehydrated and need intravenous fluids or oral rehydration with solutions that contain electrolytes. There is currently no specific treatment to cure the disease. Some patients will recover with the appropriate medical care.

To help control further spread of EVD, people that are suspected or confirmed to have EVD should be isolated from other patients and treated by health workers using strict infection control precautions.

7. What can I do to keep myself safe and prevent infection?

The risk of being infected with EVD in Canada is very low. Several steps can be taken to help in preventing infection and limiting or stopping transmission.

1. If you suspect someone of having EVD, encourage and support them in seeking appropriate medical treatment in a health-care facility.
2. When visiting patients in the hospital or caring for someone at home, hand washing with soap and water is recommended after touching a patient, being in contact with their bodily fluids, or touching his/her surroundings.