

Frequently Asked Questions: Ebola Virus

What is Ebola?

Ebola is a severe, often fatal disease caused by a virus.

How does Ebola spread?

- Ebola is spread by direct contact (through broken skin or your mouth, eyes or nose) with Body fluids (such as blood, vomit, urine, feces and sweat) of a person sick with Ebola. People only become contagious after they begin to have symptoms, such as fever.
- Objects soiled with the body fluids of a person sick with Ebola.
- The body of a person who died from Ebola.
- Ebola is not spread through the air or simply by being near someone who is infected.
- During outbreaks, the disease can spread within health care settings if workers do not wear protective gear and take proper precautions.

What are the symptoms of Ebola?

The disease usually starts with an abrupt fever, possibly with headache and joint and muscle aches.

Other symptoms may include:

- Nausea
- Weakness
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Stomach pain
- Lack of appetite

Some patients may also experience:

- Rash
- Red eyes
- Hiccups
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Chest pain
- Problems breathing
- Problems swallowing
- Bleeding inside and outside the body

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When do symptoms first appear?

Symptoms usually appear eight to 10 days after exposure but may appear anywhere from two to 21 days after exposure. People only become contagious after they begin to have symptoms, such as fever.

If a person does not develop symptoms within 21 days after exposure, he or she is not at risk for Ebola.

How serious is Ebola?

The severity of the disease varies, but over 50% of patients with Ebola have died during past outbreaks.

How is Ebola treated?

There is no approved medication for Ebola. Treatment focuses on supportive care and may require intensive care unit support. Experimental vaccines and treatments are in development but have not been fully tested for safety or effectiveness in people.

How can Ebola infection be prevented?

Measures to stop the disease from spreading include:

- Quickly identifying people who might be infected with Ebola virus
- Isolating Ebola patients from contact with uninfected people
- Following infection control guidelines in health care facilities (i.e. sterilizing medical equipment and wearing appropriate personal protective equipment)
- Monitoring the health of people who may have come into contact with an infected person

Am I at risk if I traveled to West Africa?

You are not at risk unless you traveled to Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone or Mali and had direct contact with the body fluids of a person sick with Ebola or with a person who died from Ebola. People only become contagious after they begin to have symptoms, such as fever.

If you traveled to other parts of Africa than Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Mail, you are not at risk for Ebola.

The Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) issued a travel advisory urging all U.S. residents to avoid non-essential travel to Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. Visit the CDC's website for the most up-to-date information on the Ebola outbreak.

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What should I do if I think I have Ebola?

If you visited one of the affected countries and develop fever or other symptoms within 21 days after leaving that country, seek medical care right away. You will receive help regardless of immigration status or ability to pay. Make sure to tell your doctor if you had direct contact with a person who might have had Ebola. Be sure to alert the doctor's office or emergency room about your symptoms before going. For more information, call 311.

Should I be worried about my pet dog or cat?

There have not been any reports of dogs or cats having symptoms of Ebola or making other people sick with Ebola. The risk of a pet in the U.S. being exposed to Ebola is extremely low, but if a pet were exposed, the CDC recommends that it be evaluated by public health officials and a veterinarian. More information on pets is available at CDC's Questions and Answers about Ebola and Pets page.

Should I use any special cleaning products or methods in my home, business or building when cleaning body fluids, because of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa?

No. Use normal cleaning products, and always take proper precautions when cleaning any body fluids (such as blood or vomit). If a confirmed case of Ebola results in body fluid contamination outside of a health care facility, the Health Department will assess the site and will arrange for safe clean up by a professional contractor.