



New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services
August 28, 2014

Frequently Asked Questions on Ebola Outbreak

What is Ebola?

Ebola is a virus that causes a serious and potentially life threatening hemorrhagic fever disease. The symptoms usually begin with fever, headache, joint pain, muscle aches, weakness, diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain, and loss of appetite and can progress to include internal and external bleeding.

How is Ebola passed from person to person?

Ebola is transmitted through direct contact with the bodily fluids (such as blood, saliva, vomit, diarrhea, or sweat) of a person who is infected with Ebola virus disease (EVD).

Can Ebola be transmitted through the air?

No. Ebola is not a disease like the flu that can be transmitted through the air.

How long does it take to become ill once you are infected?

Once exposed to the virus, it can take between 2 and 21 days to become ill, though most people become ill within 8–10 days.

Can I get Ebola from contaminated food or water?

No, Ebola is not transmitted through eating or drinking contaminated food or water.

Where does Ebola come from?

Ebola was first identified in Africa in 1976 and there have been sporadic outbreaks in African countries since then. Its origins are still unknown but fruit bats are considered the most likely source of the virus based on available evidence. The virus is thought to circulate in wildlife populations like bats and monkeys and then the first human becomes infected through contact with an infected animal.

Can someone get Ebola from a person who is infected but not showing any symptoms?

No. Individuals who do not have symptoms of Ebola virus disease are not contagious. For the virus to be transmitted, a person has to have direct contact with a person infected with Ebola who is experiencing symptoms.

What countries are presently experiencing Ebola cases?

This outbreak of the *Zaire ebolavirus* strain of Ebola was identified first in March 2014 in Guinea. It has since spread to Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria.

Are there cases of Ebola in the United States?

There have not been any cases of individuals contracting Ebola in the United States. Two Americans who were infected while in West Africa have been brought into the U.S. to receive care, and have since been released from the hospital.

Is it possible there will be an outbreak of Ebola in the United States?

It is very unlikely that there will be transmission of Ebola in the United States mainly because our healthcare and public health systems are vastly different from the countries in Africa where the outbreak is happening now.

Why are we not at as high a risk of an outbreak as the countries in Africa where the current outbreak is taking place?

The circumstances of patient care in the affected countries is very different that healthcare in the United States. In these West African countries, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea mainly, many patients are being treated all in one ward with limited medical staff, limited equipment, in extreme heat, with no or limited electricity and running water, and a limited public health system.

What is being done to prevent ill passengers in West Africa from getting on a plane and spreading Ebola elsewhere?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is assisting with the active screening and education efforts in West Africa to prevent sick travelers from getting on planes. Also, airports in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea are screening all outbound passengers for symptoms of Ebola, including fever, and passengers are required to respond to healthcare questions.

What is being done to prevent Ebola coming to the United States?

The CDC is monitoring people traveling into the United States at its 20 pre-existing sites across the country. Highly skilled CDC staff are on duty to respond to sick travelers who arrive at U.S. major airports, seaports, and land border crossings. If an ill passenger is identified that is of concern, CDC then takes measures to prevent any further spread, such as further investigation, monitoring for symptoms, contact tracing, testing, and sometimes isolation if necessary.

Is it safe to travel to West Africa?

The CDC has issued a level 3 travel alert for Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea, encouraging U.S. citizens to defer unnecessary travel to these countries over concern for contracting EVD in these countries and not having access to adequate healthcare should they become ill in these countries.

Is there a vaccine to prevent EVD?

There is no vaccine at this time to prevent Ebola, but researchers are working on one.

Is there a treatment for EVD?

The treatment for Ebola consists of supportive care, such as managing a patient's electrolytes, maintaining fluid levels and hydration, and treating any secondary infections. There is no known cure.

If there is no treatment, what did the Americans at Emory University Hospital receive?

The specific treatment of the Americans has not been made public and therefore the NH Department of Health and Human Services is not aware of what treatment these patients received. There is research ongoing toward EVD treatments but none are presently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for use.

What percentage of people die from Ebola?

The death rate can be as high as 90% depending on the strain of the virus, how soon a person receives care, their immune system response, and other factors. During this outbreak in West Africa so far the death rate has been about 60% for patients identified.

Why is this particular Ebola outbreak considered so serious?

This is the largest EVD outbreak ever identified and the first outbreak in West Africa. There is limited medical capacity in the affected countries, customs around the handling of dead bodies high risk, and inadequate infection control practices with under- and misinformation around how to control disease spread. In addition, the outbreak is in highly populated areas so there is a greater possibility for exposure and spread than was seen in previous outbreaks.

Are the ill Americans who were brought back to the U.S. for treatment a risk to others?

The CDC has very well established protocols in place to ensure the safe transport and care of patients with infectious diseases back to the United States. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/index.html.

Are hospitals in the U.S. prepared to handle Ebola patients?

Yes, hospitals in the U.S. and New Hampshire deal with illnesses that are spread through bodily fluids like Ebola all the time. There are procedures and protocols in place to safely manage and care for such patients and to protect healthcare workers.

Why do we see healthcare workers then taking care of Ebola patients wearing elaborate protective gear?

The healthcare systems in some countries, such as Africa, do not have as many resources as the United States so they do not always have access to the same equipment. Therefore, infection transmission prevention strategies are different.

What labs can perform diagnostic testing for Ebola?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at present is the only lab that can test for the Ebola virus in the United States. Should it become necessary to test anyone in New Hampshire for Ebola, the collection and shipment of samples should be coordinated through the NH DHHS Bureau of Infectious Disease Control by calling 603-271-4496.

Can hospitals in the U.S. safely handle samples from patients for testing?

Yes, hospitals handle samples for diagnostic testing all the time on patients with a wide range of illnesses. Hospitals have protocols in place but CDC has also issued guidance to specifically around Ebola.

What should I do if I recently traveled to West Africa?

If you traveled to West Africa (especially Liberia, Sierra Leone, or Guinea), you should monitor yourself for any symptoms of illness, and check your temperature daily to evaluate for fever, for 21 days after you return. If you become ill or develop a fever, you should contact your doctor and the DHHS Bureau of Infectious Disease Control (603-271-4496) immediately. There is no need for you to limit your activities and contacts with other people unless you become ill or develop a fever.

What is the State of New Hampshire doing to prepare for an outbreak such as Ebola?

We are diligently following the developments of this outbreak around the world, in the US and here in New Hampshire. We are in close communication with leading health experts at the CDC who are providing us with the latest information about this outbreak. We are also working with our clinicians and healthcare centers here in New Hampshire to make sure they have the latest information about this outbreak, and how to safely manage and test any suspect patient they may see, however unlikely that is. While an outbreak here in the United States is unlikely, have been preparing to respond to a public health emergency such as Ebola or any other potential health threat for many years. We have systems in place to be able to respond quickly and effectively alert and coordinate with our key response partners. We have tested these systems and conducted drills to be ready for emergencies.

For more information about Ebola, visit the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Service website at www.dhhs.nh.gov, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov, or the World Health Organization (WHO) website at www.who.org.