



EBOLA - WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

What is Ebola?

- Ebola virus disease (EVD) is a severe and often fatal disease in humans and non-human primates (monkeys, gorillas and chimpanzees).

How is it transmitted?

- The Ebola virus can spread through direct contact (through broken skin or mucous membranes including the nose, mouth and eyes) with the blood, body fluids (including stool, urine, saliva, semen) or tissue of infected persons.
- Ebola virus is not spread in the air, so simply being in the same room as an infected person without having the direct contact as described above is not a risk for infection.

Who is at risk for becoming infected?

- During EVD outbreaks, those at highest risk include healthcare workers and the family members or friends in close contact with the infected individuals – because they are in close contact with the infectious secretions/bodily fluids when caring for ill persons.

The outbreak in West Africa

- The current outbreak of Ebola in West Africa was first reported in March 2014, and involves four countries: Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria.
- This is the largest ever known outbreak of Ebola.
- Experts are working together on an international response to control the outbreak and have already proven, as with the case of Nigeria, that the disease can be contained.

The risk to travellers to West Africa

- The risk of a traveller contracting Ebola is very low in the absence of direct contact with the blood or body fluids of an infected person or animal.

- Travellers must have a valid yellow fever vaccination certificate and take routine precautions to prevent infections including malaria prophylaxis, preventing mosquito bites, regular hand washing with clean water and soap, and adhering to safe food practices.

What is the risk to people in South Africa?

- The risk of Ebola virus disease being imported into South Africa is considered to be low.

Current situation in the Western Cape and South Africa

- Currently, there have been no reported cases of EVD in the Western Cape or South Africa associated with the outbreak.
- Even though the Western Cape is unlikely to have such cases, the Western Cape Government Health has put various measures in place to ensure readiness to manage an imported case of EVD.
- All the important role-players (Communicable Disease Control, and Port Health Services, Emergency Medical Services etc.) are working together to ensure the detection, reporting and management of a suspected EVD case.
- Tygerberg Hospital is the dedicated referral centre in the province to manage and treat a suspected EVD case. The facility has specialists and trained staff able to manage such cases.
- Our South African Port Health authorities are on high alert for ill persons with EVD-compatible symptoms who have travelled from West Africa.

IMPORTANT POINTS:

People are most at risk if they:

1. have recently visited a country with confirmed Ebola cases;
2. have been in contact with a person known or suspected to have Ebola; and
3. begin to have symptoms; they should seek medical care immediately.

What are the signs & symptoms of someone affected with Ebola?

- The onset of symptoms is sudden - with fever, headache, joint and muscle pain, and intense weakness.
- This is followed by vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, and sometimes a rash. Some

patients may experience bleeding inside and outside the body.

- The incubation period, or the time interval from infection to onset of symptoms, is from 2 to 21 days. **The patients become**

contagious once they begin to show symptoms. They are not contagious during the incubation period.

How is Ebola virus disease diagnosed?

- If a person has the early symptoms of Ebola and there is reason to believe that Ebola virus disease should be considered, the patient should be isolated and public health officials notified. A blood sample can be tested to confirm infection.
- A specialised laboratory at the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) in Johannesburg is able to test for Ebola virus disease.
- EVD can only be diagnosed once a person develops signs and symptoms of the disease.

How can healthcare workers protect themselves from infection with Ebola virus?

- Healthcare workers should be able to recognize

a suspected case of EVD and be ready to apply additional infection control precautions and barrier nursing techniques. This includes wearing personal protective clothing (e.g. gloves, theatre moulded masks – if not available N95 masks, gowns and goggles), and use of infection control measures (ensuring complete equipment sterilisation and routine use of disinfectant). Infected patients must be isolated from other patients and cared for by staff that are trained in the appropriate infection control measures.

- The aim of these techniques is to avoid contact with the blood and secretions of an infected patient.

What if you have travelled to the affected areas and developed early signs of Ebola virus disease?

- Access healthcare immediately and inform the healthcare worker of your travel history and the level of contact with suspected or confirmed EVD cases.
- You will be isolated and assessed by a healthcare worker (doctor) in consultation with the Infectious Disease Specialist to find out if EVD should be considered.
- If your symptoms are compatible with EVD, a blood sample will be collected to confirm the infection.

For more information, please visit:

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