What You Need to Know about Ebola

The 2014 Ebola outbreak has affected multiple countries, including the United States. While the risk of Ebola spreading throughout the United States is low, it is important to educate yourself to help avoid the spread of disease.

Cause
The original cause of Ebola in humans is not yet known, but researchers believe the first person was infected through contact with an infected animal.

Ebola is contagious and can be spread from person to person. It can spread through direct contact with blood or other body fluids of a person who is infected, contaminated needles or infected animals. While Ebola is not spread by air or water, it can spread as a result of handling bushmeat (wild animals hunted for food). This method of transmission has only been identified in Africa.

Frequency of Occurrence
While outbreaks have been widespread in West Africa and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there is only one known case of Ebola diagnosed in the United States.

Signs and Symptoms
Symptoms of Ebola include:
> Fever (higher than 101.5 F or 38.6 C)
> Severe headache
> Muscle pain
> General weakness
> Diarrhea
> Vomiting
> Stomach pain
> Unexplained bleeding or bruising

Symptoms can appear anywhere from 2 to 21 days after exposure to the virus. The average time before symptoms appear is 8 to 10 days. People who recover from Ebola develop antibodies that last for at least 10 years.

Diagnosing the Disease
Diagnosing Ebola can be difficult in the early days of infection, since early symptoms are so similar to other more common diseases. However, if a person has early symptoms and has also been in any kind of contact with an infected person or animal, they should immediately contact health officials and be isolated until Ebola can be ruled out as a possible cause.

There are different diagnostic tests available for different stages of the disease.

Treatment
There is currently no FDA-approved vaccine or medicine for Ebola. Symptoms are treated as they appear, and the following basic interventions can significantly improve survival rates:
> Providing intravenous fluids
> Maintaining oxygen and blood pressure
> Treating any other infections that occur
There are several experimental treatments in the testing phase, but these are not yet safe to use or proven effective.

Recovery probability and time depends largely on the supportive care provided and the patient’s immune system. Long-term complications, including joint and vision problems, can occur in some patients.

**Prevention**

The best method of prevention of Ebola is to avoid contact with infected people and animals and avoid travel to areas of heavy outbreak. If you cannot avoid this type of travel, do the following:

- Practice careful hygiene. Frequently use hand sanitizer and wash your hands, especially after contact with bodily fluids.
- Avoid handling materials that may have come into contact with another person’s bodily fluids (clothes, bedding, needles, etc.)
- Avoid hospitals where Ebola patients are being treated.
- Avoid contact with bats and nonhuman primates or blood, fluids, and raw meat prepared from these animals.
- After you return, monitor your health for 21 days and seek medical care immediately if you develop symptoms of Ebola.

Health care workers who may become exposed should take the following precautions:

- Wear protective clothing, including masks, gloves, gowns, and eye protection.
- Practice proper infection control and sterilization measures.
- Isolate patients with Ebola from other patients.
- Notify health officials if you have had direct contact with the blood or body fluids, such as but not limited to, feces, saliva, urine, vomit, and semen of a person who is sick with Ebola.

**Resources**

Some content on this page was gathered from documents found on the website for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), part of the United States Department of Health and Human Services: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

Additional resources can be found here:

- World Health Organization Travel & Health: [www.who.int/topics/travel/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/travel/en/)
- U.S. Department of State Travel Warnings: [http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings.html](http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings.html)

**Additional Information**

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