



EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE: Information for travellers

12 August 2014

The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified the current Ebola virus disease (EVD) outbreak in West Africa as the largest outbreak of EVD ever recorded. This has resulted in a number of unaffected states issuing a range of travel-related advice or recommendations. To date WHO has not recommended that trade or travel restrictions be applied to the countries with reported cases of EVD.

What is Ebola virus disease?

Ebola virus disease (also known as Ebola haemorrhagic fever) is a severe, but rare viral haemorrhagic fever caused by the Ebola virus. Up to 90% of those infected with the Ebola virus may die, however some people who are infected are able to recover with intensive care and support.

The virus is transmitted through direct contact with blood or other body fluids (such as saliva, urine, vomitus or stool) from infected people, living or dead. This includes unprotected sexual contact with patients up to seven weeks after they have recovered. Contact with objects that have been contaminated with the blood or other body fluids of an infected person, such as razors, needles or soiled clothing is another means of spread.

Ebola can also spread through direct contact with blood and other bodily fluids from wild animals, living or dead, such as monkeys, pigs and bats.

Ebola virus is not transmitted through food or water, and cannot be transmitted by mosquitoes. It is not transmitted by casual contact. Although it is possible that a person infected with the Ebola virus could get on a plane and arrive in another country, the chances of the virus spreading during the journey are low, given that the virus spreads through direct or indirect contact with blood and other bodily fluids, but is not airborne like the influenza (flu) virus.

Following exposure to the virus, it may take 2 to 21 days for the disease to manifest itself. Symptoms may start suddenly with fever, headache, joint and muscle pains, weakness and sore throat. These are early symptoms, which are similar to those

caused by more common infectious diseases, and would need to be evaluated by a healthcare professional to be sure.

The next stage of the disease is characterised by vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, skin rash and impaired liver and kidney functions. Some patients also have profuse internal and external bleeding and multi-organ failure.

There is no vaccine or specific treatment for the disease. The prevention of Ebola virus infection includes measures directed at avoiding contact with the blood and body fluids of infected individuals and with objects contaminated with these fluids.

Ebola virus disease outbreak in 2014

Currently there is an outbreak of Ebola in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, and cases have been reported from Nigeria.

The Ministries of Health of these countries are working together with the World Health Organization and other partners to implement measures to control the outbreak and prevent further spread. On 8 July 2014, the WHO International Health Regulations Emergency Committee recommended that travel or trade restrictions should **not** be applied to Ebola affected areas at this time.

Advice for international travellers

The following information gives some advice for travellers arriving in, or departing from affected areas.

Risk of infection with Ebola virus and how to avoid it

If you are living in, or have travelled to, affected areas, the risk of infection with Ebola virus is extremely low. The primary way that Ebola virus is transmitted is if you have been directly exposed to the body fluids of an infected living or dead person or animal. Contact with bodily fluids includes unprotected sexual contact with patients up to seven weeks after they have recovered.

Those at highest risk are healthcare workers caring for Ebola patients, laboratory workers handling specimens of Ebola patients and, family and friends in close contact with an ill person. This is because they may come into contact with blood or body fluids of an infected person.

The Ebola virus is spread by close contact with people who are already displaying symptoms associated with EVD, such as fever, headache, muscle weakness, joint and muscle pains, vomiting and diarrhoea any other severe symptoms.

Casual contact in public places with people that do not appear to be sick will not transmit Ebola. The Ebola virus cannot be transmitted by handling money, groceries

or swimming in a pool. Mosquitoes do not transmit the Ebola virus, and the virus cannot be contracted through food, water or air.

Although the virus can survive in liquid or dried material for a number of days, Ebola virus is not difficult to kill, and bleach is an effective cleaning agent.

The best way to minimize risk of infection from Ebola virus is to avoid direct contact with the blood or body fluids (such as saliva or urine) of an infected person or animal, and avoid contact with objects that have been contaminated with the blood or other body fluids of an infected person.

Advice to travellers going to a country with reported Ebola cases

The risk that you will be exposed to the Ebola virus is extremely low. The following preventive measures should greatly reduce your risk of getting infected:

Before you travel:

1. Seek information about the current Ebola virus situation and remain aware of up-to-date information.
2. Assemble a travel health kit including a thermometer and a personal supply of surgical masks.

While you are in an area with reported cases of Ebola virus disease:

1. Avoid areas with outbreaks. Follow directives issued by the Ministry of Health and/or World Health Organization.
2. Avoid direct contact with blood and other bodily fluids:
 - a. Avoid direct contact with bodies of people who died of Ebola virus disease or unknown illnesses.
 - b. Avoid funeral or burial rituals that require handling the body of someone who has died from Ebola.
 - c. Avoid hospitals where Ebola patients are being treated.
 - d. Avoid contact with any objects, such as needles, that have been contaminated with blood or bodily fluids.
 - e. Avoid unprotected sexual activity with an infected person or a person recovering from Ebola virus disease.
3. Avoid close contact with or handling of animals.
 - a. Avoid live or dead animals, as both can spread the virus. Animals such as chimpanzees, gorillas, monkeys, forest antelope, pigs, porcupines, and fruit bats may be carriers.
 - b. Avoid handling or eating raw or undercooked meat.
4. Practice strict and frequent hand washing routines with soap and water at all times.

5. Know the symptoms of Ebola virus disease and seek medical care immediately if you develop fever, headache, fatigue, vomiting, diarrhoea or any other severe symptoms during travel in an area with Ebola cases. A number of other diseases, such as malaria, dengue, typhoid and other viral haemorrhagic fevers have similar symptoms, and will need to be excluded.
6. If you are a healthcare worker, or working in a healthcare setting, you are at higher risk and should adhere to strict infection prevention and control measures.
 - a. Health care workers should practice strict infection control measures including the appropriate use of personal protective equipment (i.e., gowns, masks, goggles, gloves and shoe covers) when providing care for suspect or confirmed cases.
 - b. In addition to routine practices for all patients, precautions for contact, droplet and aerosol generating procedures are recommended.
 - c. Patients with Ebola should be isolated.

Advice to travellers departing from a country which has reported Ebola cases

Even though you have travelled to a country experiencing an Ebola outbreak, your risk of having been exposed to the Ebola virus is generally still quite low. To assess whether your risk of exposure has increased ask yourself the following questions:

- Did you visit a hospital caring for confirmed cases of Ebola virus disease?
- Did you come into close contact with dead or ill persons known or suspected to have Ebola virus disease during your travel?
- Did you come into contact with any objects, such as needles, that may have been contaminated with blood or bodily fluids?
- Did you participate in funeral or burial rituals for anyone known or suspected to have Ebola or a severe unknown illness during your travel?
- Did you participate in the slaughtering or handling of any wild animals (living or dead) during your travel?

If you answered yes to one or more of these questions you are at increased risk of having been exposed and if you have no symptoms, you should monitor your health carefully in the 21 days following your departure from the area.

If you develop fever, headache, fatigue, vomiting, diarrhoea or any other severe symptoms, prior to travel you should contact the local health authorities immediately. Tell the medical team about your recent activities and symptoms before you go to the healthcare centre. This information will help them prepare for you and protect other people at the healthcare centre. It is likely that your symptoms are caused by a

more common infectious disease, such as malaria or dengue, but you will need to be evaluated by a health care provider to be sure.

When travelling from a country with reported cases of Ebola virus disease you should:

1. Seek medical attention if you develop symptoms of Ebola virus disease during travel and mention your travel history.
 - a. If you have symptoms during travel or upon arrival into a Caribbean country or territory, tell a flight attendant immediately, OR a port health officer or a border services officer when you arrive. They will determine whether you need further medical assessment.
2. Monitor your health upon your return or entry into the Caribbean from a country affected by the Ebola outbreak.
 - a. Seek medical attention immediately, if a fever and/or any other symptoms arise within 21 days after your arrival in the Caribbean since these may result from an infection like dengue, malaria or another disease that requires immediate investigation and treatment.
 - b. Contact the medical care facility by phone before your visit, in order to enable healthcare personnel to prepare adequately for your arrival.
 - c. Be sure to tell your healthcare provider that you have travelled to a region where Ebola virus disease was present and tell them about the activities or work you participated in and whether there was contact with a known or suspected Ebola case, or a person with an unknown illness.