

## Ebola – Information you should know

### What is Ebola?

Ebola virus disease (EVD) is a severe, often fatal haemorrhagic disease caused by infection with the Ebola virus. The disease is named after a river in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where it was first recognised in 1976. Although the disease is highly contagious, it is rare and is only spread from person-to-person contact, especially among healthcare staff and family members and carers of infected patients.

### Symptoms of Ebola

It takes between two days to three weeks from the time of infection with the Ebola virus to the time you start to show symptoms. At first, symptoms are very similar to flu and include fever, intense weakness, muscle pain, headache and sore throat. Within days, however, this turns to vomiting, diarrhoea, rash, then kidney and liver failure that can result in uncontrollable internal and external bleeding.

### How is Ebola transmitted?

According to the WHO, in this outbreak of Ebola, human-to-human transmission has been the main mode of transmission. Human-to-human transmission occurs through direct contact with the bodily fluids of those who are sick or who have died from the virus. Transmission can also occur through contact with objects like needles contaminated with infected bodily fluids. Examples of bodily fluids include blood, saliva, faeces or stools.

During an outbreak, those at higher risk of infection are health workers, family members and others in close contact with sick people and deceased patients. Burial ceremonies in which mourners have direct contact with the body of the deceased person also play a role in the transmission of the Ebola virus.

Ebola virus disease outbreaks can devastate families and communities, but the infection can be controlled through the use of recommended protective measures in clinics and hospitals, at community gatherings, or at home.

### How to prevent transmission

Those who are at high risk can prevent transmission of Ebola by regularly washing their hands with soap and clean water and by avoiding contact with those who are sick or who have died from the virus. It is also essential to wear gloves and personal protective equipment when touching those who are infected or those who have died of the virus, as well as their bodily fluids.

To help control further spread of the virus, people who are suspected or confirmed to have the disease should be isolated from other patients and treated by health workers using strict infection control precautions.

### Recommendations for people living in and travelling to countries affected by EVD:

- Business travellers are at low risk of infection. Currently, the WHO does not recommend that any travel or trade restrictions be applied with respect to this current outbreak.
- If you feel sick or plan to travel for non-essential purposes, rather postpone your travel arrangements to a later date.
- Pay strict attention to hygiene. Wash your hands often and use soap.
- Avoid hospitals that are treating suspected EVD cases.
- Avoid contact with sick people and their bodily fluids.
- Avoid direct contact with animals, including bats
- Do not eat bats, or “bush meat” from gorillas, monkeys and other primates.
- Avoid communal hand-washing during funerals or other public gatherings.

### When should someone seek medical care?

If a person has been in an area known to have Ebola virus disease or in contact with a person known or suspected to have Ebola and they begin to have symptoms, they should seek medical care immediately.

Any cases of persons who are suspected to have the disease should be reported to the nearest health unit without delay. Prompt medical care is essential to improving the rate of survival from the disease. It is also important to control spread of the disease and infection control procedures need to be started immediately.

### Diagnosis and treatment

There is no cure for Ebola virus disease nor is there a vaccine to prevent contracting the disease. However, some patients will recover with the appropriate medical care. In instances where Ebola is diagnosed, severely ill patients usually require intensive supportive care. Patients will also be frequently dehydrated and require rehydration with either oral solutions containing electrolytes or intravenous fluids. Unfortunately, there is a mortality rate of up to 90%.