

Fact Sheet

2014 West Africa Ebola Epidemic



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Overview



The 2014 Ebola epidemic is the largest in history, affecting Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone in West Africa. There are a small number of cases in Nigeria, Spain, Senegal, Germany, and the United States mainly from persons returning to these countries from the affected countries in West Africa. However, transmission has occurred in healthcare workers in Spain and the United States.

CDC and partners are taking precautions to prevent the spread of Ebola within the United States. CDC is working with other U.S. government agencies, the World Health Organization (WHO), and other domestic and international partners and has activated its Emergency Operations Center to help coordinate technical assistance and control activities with partners. CDC has also deployed teams of public health experts to West Africa and will continue to send experts to the affected countries.

Spread of Disease

Because the natural reservoir host of Ebola viruses has not yet been identified, the manner in which the virus first appears in a human at the start of an outbreak is unknown. However, researchers believe that the first patient becomes infected through contact with an infected animal.

When an infection does occur in humans, the virus can be spread in several ways to others. Ebola is spread through direct contact (through broken skin or mucous membranes in, for example, the eyes, nose, or mouth) with:

- Blood or body fluids (including but not limited to urine, saliva, sweat, feces, vomit, breast milk, and semen) of a person who is sick with Ebola
- Objects (like needles and syringes) that have been contaminated with the virus
- Infected animals
- Ebola is not spread through the air or by water, or in general, by food. However, in Africa, Ebola may be spread as a result of handling bushmeat (wild animals hunted for food) and contact with infected bats. There is no evidence that mosquitos or other insects can transmit Ebola virus. Only mammals (for example, humans, bats, monkeys, and apes) have shown the ability to become infected with and spread Ebola virus.

Healthcare providers caring for Ebola patients and the family and friends in close contact with Ebola patients are at the highest risk of getting sick because they may come in contact with infected blood or body fluids of sick patients.

During outbreaks of Ebola, the disease can spread quickly within healthcare settings (such as a clinic or hospital). Exposure to Ebola can occur in healthcare settings where hospital staff are not wearing appropriate protective equipment, including masks, gowns, and gloves and eye protection.

Once someone recovers from Ebola, they can no longer spread the virus. However, Ebola virus has been found in semen for up to 3 months. People who recover from Ebola are advised to abstain from sex or use condoms for 3 months.

Signs and Symptoms

People infected with Ebola virus have fever (101.5°F or higher), weakness, muscle pain, and severe headache, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, and unexplained hemorrhage (bleeding or bruising). Symptoms may appear two to 21 days after exposure. Death rates range from 50% to 90%.

Diagnosis

Diagnosing Ebola in a person who has been infected for only a few days is difficult because the early symptoms, such as fever, are nonspecific to Ebola infection and are seen often in patients with more commonly occurring diseases, such as Malaria and Typhoid Fever.

However, if a person has the early symptoms of Ebola and has had contact with the blood or body fluids of a person sick with Ebola, objects that have been contaminated with the blood or body fluids of a person sick with Ebola, or contact with infected animals, they should be isolated and public health professionals notified. Samples from the patient can then be collected and tested to confirm infection.

Treatment

There is no FDA-approved vaccine or medicine available for Ebola. Symptoms of Ebola are treated as they appear. The following basic interventions, when used early, can significantly improve the chance of survival:

- Providing intravenous fluids (IV) and balancing electrolytes (body salts)
- Maintaining oxygen status and blood pressure
- Treating other infections as they occur

Experimental vaccines and treatment for Ebola are under development, but they have not yet been fully tested for safety or effectiveness.

Recovery from Ebola depends on good supportive care and the patient's immune response.

Prevention

There is no FDA-approved vaccine available for Ebola.

In an area affected by an Ebola outbreak, make sure to do the following:

- Practice careful hygiene. For example, wash hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer and avoid contact with blood and body fluids.
- Do not handle items that may have come in contact with an infected person's blood or body fluids.

Healthcare workers who may be exposed to people with Ebola should follow these steps:

- Wear protective clothing, including masks, gloves, gowns, and eye protection.
- Practice proper infection control and sterilization measures. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/ebola.
- Isolate patients with Ebola from other patients.
- Avoid direct contact with the bodies of people who have died from Ebola.
- 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. The virus can enter the body through broken skin or unprotected mucous membranes in, for example, the eyes, nose, or mouth.

- Avoid funeral or burial rituals that require handling the body of someone who has died from Ebola.
- Avoid contact with bats and nonhuman primates or blood, fluids, and raw meat prepared from these animals.
- Avoid hospitals in West Africa where Ebola patients are being treated.
- Monitor health for 21 days and seek medical care immediately if symptoms of Ebola develop.



For more sources of information on this topic visit:

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT www.scchealth.co

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL www.cdc.gov

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY HEALTH www.michigan.gov/mdch

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION www.who.int