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Ebola Frequently Asked Questions

What is Ebola?

It is a viral disease caused by infection with one of the Ebola virus strains. The West African countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea are currently experiencing the largest Ebola epidemic in history. The first known case of Ebola Virus Disease diagnosed in the United States by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was a patient in Dallas, Texas, who had recently returned from Liberia. This diagnosis was confirmed on Sept. 30, 2014.

What are the symptoms of Ebola?

Symptoms include:

- fever (greater than 38.6°C or 101.5°F)
- severe headache
- muscle pain
- weakness
- diarrhea
- vomiting
- abdominal (stomach) pain
- unexplained hemorrhage (bleeding or bruising)

Symptoms may appear anywhere from 2 to 21 days after exposure to Ebola, but the average is 8 to 10 days.

How is Ebola spread?

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 of a person who is sick with Ebola
- Objects (like needles and syringes) that have been contaminated with the virus

Ebola is not spread through the air or by water.

What are body fluids?

Ebola has been detected in blood and many body fluids. Body fluids include saliva, mucus, vomit, feces, sweat, tears, breast milk, urine, and semen.

Can Ebola spread by coughing? By sneezing?

Unlike respiratory illnesses like measles or chickenpox, which can be transmitted by virus particles that remain suspended in the air after an infected person coughs or sneezes, Ebola is transmitted by direct contact with body fluids of a person who has symptoms of Ebola disease. Although coughing and sneezing are not common symptoms of Ebola, if a symptomatic patient with Ebola coughs or sneezes on someone, and saliva or mucus come into contact with that person's eyes, nose or mouth, these fluids may transmit the disease. Patients on isolation for Ebola will have their faces covered with a surgical mask, if they need to leave their room.



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What does “direct contact” mean?

Direct contact means that body fluids (blood, saliva, mucus, vomit, urine, or feces) from an infected person (alive or dead) have touched someone’s eyes, nose or mouth or an open cut, wound or abrasion.

How long does Ebola live outside the body?

Ebola is killed with hospital-grade disinfectants (such as household bleach). Ebola on dried surfaces such as doorknobs and countertops can survive for several hours; however, the virus in body fluids (such as blood) can survive up to several days at room temperature.

How do we stay safe if we work in a hospital?

Patients being treated for Ebola will be isolated in special rooms. Anyone entering a room with a patient being treated for Ebola will wear special protective equipment or Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) as a safeguard. Visiting will be restricted to these rooms. Since Ebola is not transmitted in the air there is no risk to anyone outside the patient room.

Are there medications or treatments for Ebola?

Like many viruses there are no treatments. Symptoms of Ebola are treated as they appear. The following basic interventions, when used early, can significantly improve the chances of survival:

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

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

Are patients who recover from Ebola immune for life? Can they get it again as the same or a different strain?

Recovery from Ebola depends on good supportive clinical care and a patient’s immune response. Available evidence shows that people who recover from Ebola infection develop antibodies that last for at least 10 years, possibly longer. We don’t know if people who recover are immune for life or if they can become infected with a different strain of Ebola.

If someone survives Ebola, can he or she still spread the virus?

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

Can Ebola be spread through mosquitoes?

There is no evidence that mosquitoes or other insects can transmit Ebola virus. Only mammals (e.g., humans, bats, monkeys, and apes) have shown the ability to spread and become infected with Ebola virus.

Source—<http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/about.html> (accessed October 4, 2014)