
What is Ebola?

Ebola virus disease is a rare but serious disease for which there are no licensed treatments or vaccines. However for people living outside Africa, it remains a very low threat.

Transmission of the virus occurs from person to person contact with blood and other body fluids.

The current outbreak of Ebola virus mainly affects three countries in West Africa: Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

What are the symptoms of Ebola, and what should I do if I think I'm infected?

A person infected with Ebola virus will typically develop a fever, headache, joint and muscle pain, a sore throat and intense muscle weakness.

As the disease progresses symptoms may include nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea.

These symptoms are not unlike other viruses/diseases. If infected with Ebola virus, people can also suffer with severe bleeding.

These symptoms start suddenly, between 2 and 21 days after becoming infected, but usually after 5 to 7 days.

If you start to feel unwell with any of the above symptoms within 21 days of returning from Guinea, Liberia or Sierra Leone, you should stay at home and telephone 111.

The 111 service will provide you with advice and arrange for you to be seen in a hospital if necessary, so the cause of your illness can be determined.

How do you get Ebola?

It is thought the Ebola virus has been living harmlessly in fruit bats for many years, building up in this population and spreading to other forest animals including chimpanzees and gorillas.

It is likely the virus makes its way into people after they butcher or handle dead animals contaminated with the virus.

People can become infected with Ebola virus if they come into contact with the blood, body fluids or organs of an infected person.

Most people are infected by giving care to others already infected with the virus, either by touching them (direct contact) or by cleaning up body fluids.

Hospital workers, laboratory workers and family members are at the greatest risk, however strict infection control precautions and wearing protective clothing minimises this risk.

How is Ebola spread?

You would need to have close contact with the source of infection to be put at any risk.

Ebola is generally not spread through routine social contact, such as shaking hands, with patients who do not have symptoms.

The virus is not, for example, as infectious as diseases such as the flu.

It's unlikely you would catch Ebola from travelling on a plane with someone who is infected. You would need to have direct contact with the blood or body fluids from that person.

How is diagnosis made?

It is difficult to know if a patient is infected with Ebola virus in the early stages as symptoms such as fever, headache and muscle pain are similar to those of many other diseases.

If you are suspected of having Ebola your doctor will ask you some questions and take a history helping them to risk assess you.

Diagnosis is made by sending a blood sample for urgent testing.

If you are suspected of having Ebola you will be nursed in a single room until your results are available.

You will still receive any medical care you need during your stay with the James Paget University Hospital.

If you test positive for Ebola, you will be transferred to the Royal Free Hospital in London for specialist care.

Is it infectious?

Yes, but you will only catch Ebola if you have travelled to a known infected area and/or had direct contact with a person with Ebola symptoms, or had contact with infected animals or contaminated objects.

How do you treat Ebola?

Currently there is no licensed treatment or vaccine for the treatment of the Ebola virus, although new drugs and therapies are being developed and tested.

Dehydration is common, so fluids may need to be given via a needle into your vein (a drip). Your blood pressure and oxygen levels will need to be maintained at the right level to keep your organs supported, while your body fights the virus.

How do we prevent the spread of Ebola?

Any person who is suspected or identified as having Ebola will be treated in a side room to isolate them and reduce the risk to others.

Healthcare workers looking after patients will need to wear face masks, hats, goggles, gowns, foot covers and gloves to further reduce the risk of spread.

It is advisable not to have contact with people who are symptomatic with Ebola.

It is also advised to avoid contact with deceased patients, wild animals and bush meat, local to affected areas in West Africa (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone).

Washing hands regularly with soap and water.

How will this affect my visitors?

If you are confirmed positive for Ebola it is likely you will not be permitted visitors.

Your family and close contacts would also need to be screened for the virus.

What happens about washing my clothes?

Any of your personal clothing/belongings that have been contaminated with body fluids will need to be disposed of.

Allowing your family/contacts to handle these possessions would put them at increased risk of contracting the virus.

Whilst in hospital it is advised you wear clothing provided by the Trust.

Further Information

Please ask to speak to an Infection Prevention Nurse. Tel: 01493 453136

Feedback

We want your visit to be as comfortable as possible. Please talk to the person in charge if you have any concerns. If the ward/department staff are unable to resolve your concern, please ask for our Patient Advice and Liaison (PALS) information. Please be assured that raising a concern will not impact on your care. **Before you leave the hospital you will be asked to complete a Friends and Family Test feedback card.** Providing your feedback is vital in helping to transform NHS services and to support patient choice.

Trust Values

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Courtesy and respect• A welcoming and positive attitude• Polite, friendly and interested in people• Value and respect people as individuals So people feel welcome• Attentively kind and helpful• Look out for dignity, privacy & humanity• Attentive, responsive & take time to help• Visible presence of staff to provide care So people feel cared for | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Responsive communication• Listen to people & answer their questions• Keep people clearly informed• Involve people So people feel in control• Effective and professional• Safe, knowledgeable and reassuring• Effective care / services from joined up teams• Organised and timely, looking to improve So people feel safe |
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The hospital can arrange for an interpreter or person to sign to assist you in communicating effectively with staff during your stay. Please let us know.

For a large print version of this leaflet, contact PALS 01493 453240