FAQs on Ebola

AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION
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Ebola: What you need to know if you live in the U.S.

Ebola is a serious disease. It can often be deadly to humans. Because of this, many people are concerned about Ebola. However, if you live in the United States, it's very unlikely that you will be infected with the disease.

What is Ebola? Where does it come from?

Ebola is a disease that is caused by a virus. The virus is believed to be spread to people by wild animals. In humans, Ebola can be spread from a person who has symptoms to another person.

Ebola first appeared in 1976 in two outbreaks in Africa. Since then, there have been other outbreaks of Ebola in Africa.

In 2014, a serious Ebola outbreak was detected in West Africa, causing thousands of deaths. The disease spread beyond Africa when sick people traveled to other countries and brought the disease with them.

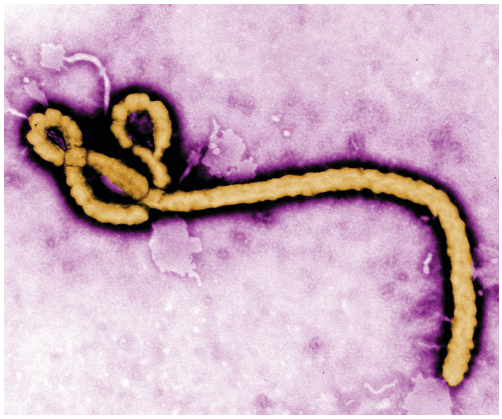

Image courtesy CDC Public Health Image Library, Frederick Murphy

How does Ebola spread between people?

Image courtesy CDC

Ebola is spread by direct contact — such as through broken skin or through your mouth, eyes or nose — with the body fluids of a person who is sick with the disease and has symptoms.

Objects with body fluids on them, such as needles, can also spread Ebola. Body fluids include blood, vomit, feces, saliva, semen, sweat and breast milk.

Ebola is not spread through the air or by water, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It is not spread by food legally sold in the U.S. You can't catch Ebola from mosquitoes or other insects.

When Ebola is spread, it's often among those who have close contact with a sick person, such as their family. Health workers can also get Ebola while caring for patients with the disease.

You can only catch Ebola from people who are infected and have symptoms.

I live in the United States. Am I at risk for Ebola?

The risk of catching Ebola in the U.S. is very low. Few people have ever become infected with Ebola while in the United States. In fact, as of October 2014, only two people had become infected with Ebola while in America. They were both health workers who had cared for a sick patient who had traveled from Africa, where he caught the disease.

Another reason that you are unlikely to be at risk for Ebola is the U.S. health system. Unlike many countries in Africa, the U.S. has a strong public health network. This network works to detect dangerous diseases. It also helps prevent them from spreading. The U.S. has one of the world's most advanced health care systems.

What about my cat or dog?

Household pets are not at significant risk for Ebola in the U.S., CDC says.

The chances of a dog or cat being exposed to Ebola in the U.S. are very low. Pets would have to come into contact with body fluids of an infected person who has symptoms.

Even in areas of Africa with Ebola, there have been no reports of dogs or cats becoming sick with Ebola.

It's important to keep pets away from body fluids of a person with symptoms of Ebola, however.

What are the symptoms?

Ebola symptoms usually appear within two to 21 days after being exposed to the virus. But the average is eight to 10 days, according to CDC.

Symptoms of Ebola are:

- fever
- muscle pain
- vomiting
- unexplained bleeding or bruising
- severe headache
- diarrhea
- stomach pain

How can I protect myself?

If you travel to an area where there is an Ebola outbreak or are in direct contact with someone who has Ebola, CDC offers safety advice, including:

- Wash your hands and avoid contact with body fluids of an infected person.
- Don't handle items that may have come in contact with an infected person's body fluids. These can include clothes, bedding or medical equipment.
- Don't touch the body of someone who has died from Ebola.
- If you are in a country with an Ebola outbreak, avoid contact with animals such as bats or monkeys or with raw or undercooked meat. Don't eat wild animals hunted for food, also known as bush meat.

What if I think I have Ebola?

After you return from a country with an Ebola outbreak or after being in close contact with a person sick from Ebola, you should take several steps, CDC says.

- Call your doctor and tell her or him about your recent travel or contact with a person who has Ebola.
- Monitor your health for 21 days. Take your temperature every morning and evening. Watch for symptoms.
- If you decide to visit the doctor's office or emergency room, call ahead before you go. Tell them about your possible exposure to Ebola.

Are there vaccines for Ebola? What about treatment?

There are no approved vaccines or medicines for Ebola. Scientists are working to create them. In the meantime, medical care for people with Ebola can include giving them fluids, balancing their body salts and treating other infections.

Recovery from Ebola occurs when a person's immune system fights off the virus. Patients who recover from Ebola have antibodies that last for at least 10 years, CDC says. People who have recovered sometimes have long-term effects, such as joint or vision problems.

Where can I get more information on Ebola?

Visit CDC at www.cdc.gov/ebola, the World Health Organization at www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/en and APHA at www.apha.org/topics-and-issues/ebola.

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