
Ebola: Frequently Asked Questions

Updated March, 2016

Important things to know:

- There is no longer a widespread outbreak of Ebola occurring in West Africa. Sporadic cases may still occur.
- No one has contracted Ebola disease in Minnesota.
- Ebola is not spread through air, food, or water. It is only spread through direct contact with blood or other body fluids of a person with symptoms of Ebola or who has died from Ebola.

Ebola Virus Disease

What is Ebola?

- Ebola, or Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), is caused by the Ebola virus, a member of the filovirus family. It affects many of the body's organ systems and often causes severe illness.

Is Ebola a new virus? How much do we know about it?

- Ebola is not a new virus.
- Ebola has been well studied since it was discovered in 1976. We know a lot about the virus and how it is spread.

What are symptoms of Ebola?

- Symptoms of Ebola most commonly start 8-10 days after coming into contact with Ebola virus but can occur as early as 2 days to up to 21 days after exposure. Symptoms include:
 - Fever
 - Headache
 - Joint and muscle aches
 - Weakness
 - Diarrhea
 - Vomiting
 - Stomach pain
 - Lack of appetite
 - Abnormal bleeding
- Ebola is a serious disease with a high fatality rate. Unfortunately, there are no available medications to cure Ebola, and there is no vaccine or medicine to prevent Ebola.

How do you treat Ebola disease?

- There is no medication to cure Ebola and no vaccine to prevent it. Vaccines are in development, but none have been approved yet.
- Treatment for Ebola is supportive, meaning providing fluids, maintaining blood pressure, and replacing lost blood.
- Seeking health care as soon as symptoms appear increases the chances of surviving.

Does Ebola virus stay in the body after a patient has recovered?

- In general, Ebola does not stay in the body after a patient has fully recovered.
- Ebola has been found in semen, breast milk, and other body fluids for longer periods of time. Persons who are recovering need to take some additional steps so that others are not exposed to these fluids.

If a person survives Ebola infection, are they immune to it?

- Evidence shows that people who recover from Ebola develop antibodies that would likely protect them from the same strain for about 10 years or longer.



Transmission

How is Ebola spread?

- Ebola is spread by direct contact with blood or other body fluids (such as: vomit, diarrhea, urine, breast milk, sweat, semen) of an infected person who has symptoms of Ebola or who has recently died from Ebola.
- It can also be spread on objects or surfaces contaminated by body fluids of an infected person, for example clothing or bedding of an ill person that have not been cleaned.
- Ebola can only be spread from one person to another when someone has symptoms.
- Ebola is not spread through air, food, or water.
- Ebola is not spread through casual contact.
- In some circumstances, Ebola may be spread from sick or dead wild animals. It is not known for sure which wild animals carry Ebola, but it has been found in bats, monkeys, and apes.
 - Ebola is not generally spread through food, but the hunting, butchering, and processing of bush meat brings people into contact with blood and other fluids of potentially infected animals. It is illegal to bring bush meat into the United States.
 - Currently, there are no reports of dogs or other pets becoming sick with Ebola or transmitting it to humans.
 - There is no evidence of mosquitoes or other insects transmitting Ebola.

Who can spread Ebola to others?

- For a person to spread Ebola to others, they must have:
 1. Been in an area within the last 21 days where Ebola disease is occurring, **AND**
 2. Been in contact with the blood or body fluids (such as: vomit, diarrhea, urine, breast milk, sweat, semen) of a person with Ebola or who has died from Ebola, **AND**
 3. Developed Ebola symptoms.

Is Ebola airborne?

- No. Ebola is not airborne.
- Airborne transmission means germs hang in the air after a person talks, coughs or sneezes. The germs in the air can cause disease long after the infected person has left a room, so direct contact is not needed for someone else to get sick. This is not the case with Ebola.
 - Airborne diseases include: chickenpox, tuberculosis and measles.
- To get Ebola, you have to come in direct contact with body fluids of someone who is sick with Ebola.

Is Ebola sexually transmitted?

- There is evidence of Ebola virus in semen of some men who have recovered from Ebola. It is possible that sexual transmission may occur.
- Female to male transmission is less probable, but theoretically possible.
- More research is needed on the risks of sexual transmission.

Is there concern that the virus will mutate and become airborne?

- The virus is constantly mutating, but the mutation rate is extremely slow. It's very unlikely, based on the type of virus, that Ebola would become airborne.

How long does Ebola last outside the body?

- Ebola virus that is dry on surfaces, like doorknobs and countertops, can survive for several hours; however, virus that is on surfaces in body fluids, like blood, can live longer.

Risk of Exposure

Who is at risk?

- The risk of catching Ebola in the general public is extremely low.
- Ebola is not spread by casual contact with someone who has traveled to countries in West Africa with Ebola outbreaks. A person cannot spread Ebola unless they are showing symptoms.
- Health care providers or family members caring for a person with Ebola are at highest risk because they may come in contact with blood or body fluids.

Should I avoid contact with a relative/co-worker/classmate/neighbor or anyone else that recently traveled to West Africa?

- No. You do not need to avoid contact with someone who has recently traveled to a country where an Ebola outbreak has occurred.
- Ebola is spread through direct contact with blood or body fluids. It is only spread when a person is showing symptoms. Although there are no Ebola cases in Minnesota, it's always a good idea to avoid contact with another person's blood.
 - People who work in health care settings or other occupations that may come into contact with blood or other body fluids should be properly trained.
- If a person who recently traveled to West Africa has symptoms of Ebola (including fever) they should contact their health care provider and tell them about their travel history. Their health care provider will evaluate their risk for Ebola as well as other more common infections of West Africa such as malaria and typhoid.

Should I avoid public transportation?

- No. There is no reason to avoid public transportation or other public places.
 - Individuals being monitored for symptoms of Ebola who have a known exposure will be restricted from using public transportation or attending mass gatherings, but there is no reason for others to avoid public transportation or public places.
- The risk of catching Ebola in the general public is extremely low.
- No one has contracted Ebola disease in Minnesota.

More Information

- **Information about Ebola**
 - MDH: www.health.state.mn.us/ebola
 - CDC: www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola.
- **Ebola Traveler Monitoring:** www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/vhf/monitoring.html
- **Ebola Preparedness and Response:** www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/vhf/response.html
- **Travel Notices and Recommendations**
 - CDC: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/>
 - WHO: www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/en/