



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
HEALTH AND CONSUMERS DIRECTORATE-GENERAL

Public health directorate
Health threats unit
Secretariat of the Health Security Committee

Ebola virus disease – Information for travellers

21 October 2014

Version: 3

This document was endorsed by the Health Security
Committee.

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(Update, 21 October 2014)



What is Ebola virus disease?

Ebola is a severe disease, often fatal, caused by the Ebola virus.

It is transmitted through direct contact with blood or other bodily fluids (e.g. saliva, urine, vomit, semen) from infected people, dead or alive.

Symptoms usually appear between two days and 21 days following exposure to the virus. The disease may start suddenly with fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, headache and muscle aches, or other non-specific symptoms. In a later stage, some patients may have profuse internal and external bleeding and multi-organ failure.

There is no licensed vaccine or validated treatment for the disease.

Risk of infection with Ebola virus and how to avoid it

Even if you are living in, or have travelled to, areas with community transmission, the risk of infection with Ebola virus is low, unless you have been directly exposed to the bodily fluids of dead or living infected persons or animals. Contact with bodily fluids includes unprotected sexual contact with patients up to three months after they have recovered.

Casual contact in public places with people that do not appear to be sick does not transmit Ebola. You cannot contract Ebola virus by handling money, groceries, or swimming in a pool. Mosquitoes do not transmit the Ebola virus. And Ebola virus does not transmit through the air as influenza does.

Ebola virus is easily killed by soap, bleach, sunlight, and high temperatures or drying. Machine-washing clothes that have been contaminated with fluids will destroy Ebola virus. Ebola virus survives only a short time on surfaces that are in the sun or have dried. It can survive for a longer time on clothes or materials which have been stained with blood or other bodily fluids.

There is a risk of transmission of Ebola through contact with utensils or contaminated material in healthcare settings if the correct infection control procedures are not properly carried out.

Outbreak in 2014

The World Health Organization declared the current outbreak of Ebola in Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone a 'Public Health Event of International Concern'. The following information provides advice for travellers arriving in, or departing from, areas with community transmission.

Advice for people arriving in Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and other areas with community transmission

Consult the advice provided by your national authorities on travel to countries with community transmission. If travelling to a country with community transmission, the following preventive measures should decrease the risk of getting infected:

- Avoid any contact with blood or bodily fluids of a patient or a corpse and possibly contaminated objects.
- Wash hands regularly, using soap or antiseptics.
- Avoid contact with wild animals, alive or dead; do not consume 'bushmeat'.
- Avoid habitats which might be populated by bats, such as caves, isolated shelters, or mining sites.
- Avoid having unprotected sexual intercourse.

You should be aware that there is an increased risk of infection in healthcare facilities. It is therefore prudent to:

- identify appropriate in-country healthcare facilities through your local business contacts, organisation, friends or relatives; and
- ensure that, in the event of any illness or accident, medical evacuation is covered by travel insurance, to limit exposure in local healthcare facilities.

Advice to people departing from Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and other areas with community transmission

The risk that you have been exposed to the Ebola virus is low, unless you had contact with Ebola patients, touched infected corpses, or visited healthcare facilities.

However, if you develop fever, unexplained fatigue, diarrhoea or any other severe symptoms (e.g. vomiting, unexplained haemorrhage, and severe headache) in the three weeks after departure from an area with community transmission, you should:

- seek rapid medical attention mentioning your travel history, and
- contact the medical care facility by phone before your visit in order to enable medical personnel to prepare appropriate personal protection at the time of admission.

Please be aware that the World Health Organization has recommended that countries with Ebola transmission should conduct exit screening for unexplained illness consistent with potential Ebola virus infection, and that Ebola cases and their contacts should only travel if the travel is part of an appropriate medical evacuation.