

# Ebola Virus Disease

## Frequently Asked Questions for the General Public

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## Background

The 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa is the largest Ebola outbreak in history. The latest information on the outbreak is available from [WHO](http://www.who.int).

## What is Ebola?

Ebola virus disease is a severe, often fatal, infectious disease caused by the Ebola virus. It was first recognised in 1976 and has caused sporadic outbreaks since in several African countries. Transmission of the virus occurs from person to person through direct contact with blood and other body fluids.

## What are the signs and symptoms of Ebola?

Ebola illness usually has a sudden onset between 2 and 21 days after exposure to the virus. The initial signs and symptoms include:

- Fever (38.6°C/101.5°F or higher)
- Weakness
- Muscle and joint pains
- Headache
- Diarrhoea
- Vomiting

Other symptoms may include stomach pain, rash and sore throat. Later, there may be unexplained bruising or bleeding. Death may occur. During the current Ebola outbreak, approximately 53% of persons with the disease are dying.

## How is Ebola spread?

The virus is spread through direct contact (through broken skin or mucous membranes, for example the mouth, nostrils, eyes) with blood and body fluids (urine, faeces, saliva, vomit and semen) of a living or dead person with Ebola. The virus can also be spread through direct contact with items that have been contaminated with the virus, such as soiled clothing, bed linen or used needles. It can also be caught through unprotected sexual contact with patients who have recently recovered from the disease (up to three months).

Burial ceremonies in which mourners have direct contact with the body of a deceased Ebola patient can also play an important role in the spread of the virus.

Ebola is not spread through the air like influenza.

Ebola can also be caught through contact with an infected animal, living or dead. Non-human primates (such as monkeys, gorillas and chimpanzees) and bats are known to carry the virus in Africa. Handling bushmeat (the meat of wild animals as food) may be a risk for spread of the virus in Africa.

## **Can I get Ebola from a person who is infected but does not have a fever or any symptoms?**

No. A person infected with Ebola is not contagious (cannot pass on the infection) until symptoms appear.

## **How is Ebola treated?**

There is currently no known effective treatment of Ebola although a number of medicines are being investigated. Signs and symptoms are treated as they appear. Early recognition of Ebola is important for providing appropriate patient care and preventing the spread of infection. There are no approved vaccines available for Ebola but research is ongoing.

## **Are people in Ireland at risk of Ebola?**

Ebola is unlikely to be imported into Ireland. There have been a small number of cases in countries outside Africa, however healthcare providers have been advised to be alert for and evaluate any patients suspected of having Ebola.

## **What do I do if I'm returning to Ireland from the area where the outbreak is occurring?**

If you have had no contact with Ebola patients or articles potentially contaminated by them then you do not need to take any precautions as you are not at risk. If you become ill within 21 days of return, you should contact your doctor for assessment and let him/her know of your recent travel history.

If you were working to contain the outbreak in an affected area, please see the advice for [returning aid workers](#).

## **What is the current travel advice?**

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) provides guidance to travellers that is updated regularly. Please consult the website [here](#) and click to the relevant country. Further information on areas affected by this outbreak is available [here](#). Currently DFA is advising against non-essential travel to Liberia, Guinea or Sierra Leone. In addition, for security reasons, DFA are advising against non-essential travel to Nigeria.

## What do I do if I am travelling to an area where the outbreak is occurring?

For visitors to or residents in affected areas, the risk of infection in the community is considered very low if precautions are strictly followed:

- Avoiding contact with symptomatic patients and/or their body fluids;
  - Avoiding contact with corpses and/or bodily fluids from deceased patients;
  - Avoiding contact with wild animals both alive and dead
  - Avoiding consumption of 'bush meat'
- 
- Wash hands regularly, using detergents or antiseptics;
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- Check your travel insurance plan and ensure that medical evacuation is covered in the event of illness.

Please see travel advice on HPSC website [here](#).

## What should I do if I have been to an affected area and have had contact with someone who may have Ebola?

If you have been in an affected area and you had known contact with an Ebola patient or the remains of someone who died of Ebola, you should contact your local Department of Public Health at the phone number given below:

HSE area (Counties)	Phone number (Office hours)
East (Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow)	01 635 2145
Midlands (Laois, Offaly, Longford, Westmeath)	057 935 9891
Midwest (Limerick, Clare, North Tipperary)	061 483 338
North East (Louth, Meath, Cavan, Monaghan)	046 907 6412
North West (Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim)	071 985 2900
South East (Kilkenny, Carlow, Wexford, Waterford, South Tipperary)	056 778 4142
South (Cork, Kerry)	021 492 7601
West (Galway, Mayo, Roscommon)	091 775 200

Staff in the Department of Public Health will advise you whether you need to monitor your health in the 21 days after your contact with an Ebola patient.

## What activities are not a risk?

If you are in an affected country, it is important to bear in mind that Ebola is **not** transmitted by:

- Casual contact in public places with people who do not appear to be sick
- Handling money
- Handling groceries
- Swimming in a swimming pool
- Mosquitoes **do not transmit** Ebola