

EBOLA (Ebola Virus Disease)

Frequently Asked Questions for the General Public

(Last Updated: December 30, 2014)

What is Ebola?

- Ebola is a severe, often deadly disease that is caused by the Ebola virus. Symptoms of Ebola most commonly begin 8-10 days after coming into contact with the Ebola virus, but symptoms can occur anywhere between 2-21 days after exposure.
- Symptoms of Ebola include: fever, headache, joint and muscle pain, diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain, lack of appetite and abnormal bleeding. These symptoms are not specific to Ebola and are often seen with other illnesses.

Where is the current outbreak occurring?

- The current outbreak of Ebola began in December 2013. The countries most affected by Ebola are Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. Each of these countries has had hundreds of cases of the disease.
- Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, Spain and the U.S. have also seen cases of Ebola, but these countries do not have a sustained outbreak. Each of these countries has controlled the transmission of disease.

How is Ebola spread?

- Ebola is spread by direct contact with blood or other body fluids (vomit, diarrhea, urine, saliva, sweat, breast milk, semen) of an infected person who has symptoms of Ebola or has recently died of Ebola.
- It can also be spread on objects or surfaces contaminated with the body fluids of an infected person, such as clothing or bedding that have not been cleaned.
- Ebola is **not** spread through food, water or the air.

Who can spread Ebola to others?

EBOLA (Ebola Virus Disease)

- For a person to spread Ebola to others, they must have
 - been in an area within the last 21 days where Ebola disease is occurring
AND
 - been in contact with the blood or body fluids of a person with Ebola or who has died from Ebola
AND
 - developed Ebola symptoms.
- **Only patients experiencing symptoms can transmit the virus.** Ebola cannot be spread to other people before symptoms begin.

Is there a risk of getting Ebola in Illinois?

- The risk of becoming infected with Ebola in Illinois is extremely low. There have been no Ebola cases in Illinois. The Department, along with local health departments and local hospitals, continues to monitor for cases of Ebola.

Who is at risk of getting Ebola?

- Health care providers caring for Ebola patients and the family and friends in close contact with Ebola patients are at the highest risk of getting sick because they may come in contact with the blood or body fluids of sick patients.
- Ebola can spread within clinics or hospitals if doctors and nurses do not use appropriate personal protective equipment (gloves, gowns, masks, etc.) correctly. It is important to properly dispose of clothing or bedding that has come into contact with an Ebola patient.
- People who touch the bodies of patients who died of Ebola may also be at risk.

Are Illinois hospitals ready to care for patients with Ebola?

- Each hospital is responsible for applying the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) infection control and screening recommendations.
- Hospitals that follow CDC's infection control recommendations and properly isolate a

EBOLA (Ebola Virus Disease)

patient in a private room can safely manage a patient with Ebola.

- Hospitals with staff that routinely follow procedures to prevent infections, such as wearing gloves, gowns, masks and other protective gear so that they don't come in contact with blood or other body fluids of an infected patient, can safely manage a patient with Ebola.

What would the Department do if there was a case of Ebola in Illinois?

- The Department, local health departments, hospitals and clinics have surveillance systems in place to identify suspected cases of Ebola.
- The case would be isolated and cared for at a hospital, and contacts of the case will be closely monitored to see if they develop symptoms of the disease.

What is the treatment for Ebola?

- Supportive therapy is the standard treatment for Ebola patients. This includes:
 - balancing patients' fluids and electrolytes
 - maintaining their oxygen and blood pressure
 - treating them for any complicating infections
- Experimental treatments have been used on some Ebola patients, but it is not known how effective they have been. No treatment or vaccine has been tested for safety or effectiveness in humans, and none have been officially approved. No experimental treatments will likely be available to treat large numbers of people for some time.

What is contact tracing?

- Contact tracing is the process of finding everyone who comes into direct contact with a sick Ebola patient. Contacts are monitored for 21 days (the maximum length of the incubation period) to see if they develop symptoms of the disease. If the contact develops fever or other symptoms of Ebola, they are immediately isolated and provided care, and the cycle begins again – all of the new patient's contacts are found and monitored for 21 days.

What is quarantine and isolation?

EBOLA (Ebola Virus Disease)

- Quarantine means keeping an exposed individual away from others, even before symptoms have developed. Isolation means keeping a sick person away from others. Many times these terms are used interchangeably.

Can the State of Illinois order a person to be isolated or quarantined?

- Voluntary compliance is preferred, but if an exposed person does not voluntarily comply, public health authorities can issue an “order” for isolation or quarantine.
- Local health departments have the responsibility for issuing and enforcing orders. A governor’s proclamation is not needed to issue or enforce isolation or quarantine orders.

Is it safe to travel overseas?

- CDC has recommended that people not travel to Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, the three countries most affected by the outbreak, unless travel is essential, such as providing humanitarian aid.
- There is concern that travelers may not have access to health care in these countries. If travel is essential, avoid direct contact with people sick with Ebola.

What will happen if I come to Illinois from one of the affected countries? Will I be quarantined?

- You will be given a kit from the CDC when passing through the airport. This kit will contain information on Ebola, a thermometer and a guide on how to monitor yourself daily for Ebola.
- You will be monitored by your local health department for 21 days (from the date you left the Ebola affected country) to see if you develop symptoms of Ebola. The local health department will determine how you will be monitored. You may be asked to record and report your own temperature, or someone from the local health department may come to your residence to take your temperature.
- Other specifics depend on your risk level. If you are at high-risk or some-risk of developing Ebola, you may be excluded from public places like work and school. You may also be prohibited from using public transportation like planes, trains or buses. If you are at low-risk or no-risk, you will still be monitored, but will be free to go to work and school, and use public transportation.
- Current CDC and Illinois guidelines do not recommend quarantine for low-risk individuals returning from the affected countries.

EBOLA (Ebola Virus Disease)

- Call your doctor and local health department right away if you develop a fever, headache or joint and muscle aches within three weeks of returning home.

Should I avoid contact with a person that recently traveled to West Africa?

- No, you do not need to avoid contact with someone who recently returned from one of the affected countries unless they have symptoms of Ebola.
- Ebola only spreads when an infected person is showing symptoms, and only spreads through direct contact with blood or body fluids.
- If a person who recently returned from West Africa has symptoms of Ebola, such as fever, the individual should contact a health care provider and tell them about recent travel history and any exposures to ill individuals. The health care provider will evaluate the person's risk for Ebola as well as other more common infections in West Africa, such as malaria and typhoid.

Are people being screened for Ebola at airports?

- Five airports in the U.S., including O'Hare International Airport in Chicago, are screening passengers from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.
- Travelers will be observed for symptoms of Ebola and will be asked questions about recent travel and exposures to ill individuals. Travelers will also be given a kit that contains information about Ebola, a thermometer and a guide on how to self monitor for symptoms of Ebola.
- If a traveler has exposures or symptoms that may point to Ebola, they will be evaluated by a public health officer from the CDC quarantine station. Travelers without symptoms will be referred to the local health department of their final destination where they will be monitored for 21 days to check for symptoms of Ebola.

What can be expected in the near future?

- Control of the outbreak in West Africa may take many months. This means the potential for cases to enter the U.S. will be present for some time.
- Health care providers will continue to follow standard practices so they do not come in contact with blood or body fluids of sick patients. They will also continue asking sick patients about recent travel to make sure Ebola can be ruled out.
- The Department will continue to monitor the outbreak and work with partners like the CDC, local health departments and hospitals. Updates will be provided to health care providers and the public as needed.

EBOLA (Ebola Virus Disease)

Additional Resources:

CDC website: <http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/index.html>

WHO website: <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/en/>

CDC travel guidelines: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/diseases/ebola>