



Frequently asked questions and answers about

Ebola

From the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

What is Ebola?

Ebola, previously known as Ebola hemorrhagic fever, is a severe, often fatal disease in humans and nonhuman primates (such as monkeys, gorillas, and chimpanzees).

The natural reservoir host of Ebola remains unknown. However, on the basis of available evidence and the nature of similar viruses, researchers believe that the virus is animal-borne with bats being the most likely reservoir.

How does Ebola spread?

Because the natural reservoir host of Ebola has not yet been identified, the manner by which the virus first appears in a human at the start of an outbreak is unknown. However, researchers believe that the first patient becomes infected through contact with an infected animal.

When an infection does occur in humans, there are several ways the virus can be spread to others. These include:

- direct contact with the blood or body fluids (including but not limited to feces, saliva, urine, vomit and semen) of a person who is sick with Ebola; and
- contact with objects (like needles and syringes) that have been contaminated with the blood or body fluids of an infected person or with infected animals.

The virus in the blood and body fluids can enter another person's body through broken skin or unprotected mucous membranes in, for example, the eyes, nose, or mouth. The viruses that cause Ebola are often spread among families and friends, because they come in close contact with blood or body fluids when caring for ill persons.

Ebola is not spread through the air or by water, or in general, food. However, in Africa, Ebola may be spread as a result of handling bushmeat (wild animals hunted for food) and contact with infected bats.

What are the symptoms of Ebola?

- Fever (above 101.5°)
- Severe headache
- Muscle pain
- Weakness
- Diarrhea

- Vomiting
- Stomach pain
- Unexplained hemorrhage (bleeding or bruising)

Symptoms may appear anywhere from 2 to 21 days after exposure to Ebola, but the average is 8 to 10 days. Recovery from Ebola depends on the patient's immune response. People who recover from Ebola infection develop antibodies that last for at least 10 years.

What is the treatment for Ebola?

No specific vaccine or medicine (e.g., antiviral drug) has been proven to be effective against Ebola. Symptoms of Ebola are treated as they appear. The following basic interventions, when used early, can significantly improve the chances of survival:

- Providing intravenous fluids (IV) and balancing electrolytes (body salts);
- Maintaining oxygen status and blood pressure; and
- Treating other infections if they occur.

How can Ebola be prevented?

If you travel to or are in an area affected by an Ebola outbreak, make sure to do the following:

- Practice careful hygiene. Avoid contact with blood and body fluids.
- Do not handle items that may have come in contact with an infected person's blood or body fluids.
- Avoid funeral or burial rituals that require handling the body of someone who has died from Ebola.
- Avoid contact with bats and nonhuman primates or blood, fluids, and raw meat prepared from these animals.
- After you return, monitor your health for 21 days and seek medical care immediately if you develop symptoms of Ebola.

**For more information on Ebola and/or other public health topics,
visit us on the web at:**

www.bhsj.org

Or call your local Health Department office at:

Coldwater
279-9561 x 0105#

Hillsdale
437-7395 x0309#

Three Rivers
273-2161 x 0241#