



**AUSTIN/TRAVIS COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
DEPARTMENT**



Questions and Answers on Ebola

10/2/2014

About Ebola Virus Disease

Ebola is a rare and deadly disease caused by infection with one of the Ebola virus strains. Ebola can cause disease in humans and nonhuman primates (monkeys, gorillas, and chimpanzees). Ebola viruses are found in several African countries. Ebola was first discovered in 1976 near the Ebola River in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Since then, outbreaks have appeared sporadically in Africa.

Ebola in the United States

Are there any cases of people contracting Ebola in the U.S.?

CDC confirmed on September 30, 2014 the first travel-associated case of Ebola to be diagnosed in the United States. The person traveled from West Africa to Dallas, Texas, and later sought medical care at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital of Dallas after developing Ebola symptoms. The medical facility has isolated the patient. Based on the person's travel history and symptoms, CDC recommended testing for Ebola. CDC and public health officials in Texas are identifying people who have had close personal contact with the ill person and health care professionals have been reminded to use meticulous infection control at all times.

CDC recognizes that even a single case of Ebola diagnosed in the United States raises concerns. Knowing the possibility exists, medical and public health professionals across the country have been preparing to respond.

Is there a danger of Ebola spreading in the U.S.?

Ebola is not spread through casual contact; therefore, the risk of an outbreak in the U.S. is very low. We know how to stop Ebola's further spread: thorough case finding, isolation of ill people, contacting people exposed to the ill person, and further isolation of contacts if they develop symptoms. The U.S. public health and medical systems have had prior experience with sporadic cases of diseases such as Ebola. In the past decade, the United States had five imported cases of Viral Hemorrhagic Fever (VHF) diseases similar to Ebola. None resulted in any transmission in the United States.

Are people who were on the plane with this patient at risk?

A person must have symptoms to spread Ebola to others. The ill person did not exhibit symptoms of Ebola during the flights from West Africa and CDC does not recommend that people on the same commercial airline flights undergo monitoring. The person reported developing symptoms five days after the return flight.

What is the Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department doing about Ebola?

Austin/Travis County HHSD is continuing with ongoing operations and core practices to monitor for infectious disease and public health threats. Activities include the monitoring of hospital emergency department chief complaint data and over-the-counter medicine sales; working closely with hospital infection control practitioners, first responders and other health care providers; and following up on reports of communicable disease.

The risk of transmission in our city is very low, but A/TCHHSD is closely monitoring the situation, working in concert with the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) and CDC, and participating in state and regional briefings and conference calls to maintain and relate current knowledge of the situation. Information is being distributed through the Travis County Medical Society and other channels to provide area health care providers with situational updates regarding the latest case definitions, infection control practices, procedures for submission of lab specimens, and protocols to report suspected cases. A/TCHHSD will update the community as the situation warrants.

Risk of Exposure

Prior to this week, all cases of human illness or death from Ebola have occurred in Africa, Until this week, no cases have been reported in the United States. Healthcare 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.

Transmission

The virus can be spread in several ways to others. **Ebola is not spread through the air or by water.**

Ebola is only spread through direct contact (through broken skin or mucous membranes) with:

- blood or body fluids (including urine, saliva, feces, vomit, and semen) of a person who is sick with Ebola
- objects (like needles and syringes) that have been contaminated with the virus
- infected animals

Healthcare 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 infected blood or body fluids of sick patients. Once someone recovers from Ebola, they can no longer spread the virus. However, Ebola virus has been found in semen for up to three months. People who recover from Ebola are advised to abstain from sex or use condoms for three months.

What is CDC doing in the U.S. about the outbreak in West Africa?

CDC has activated its Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to help coordinate technical assistance and control activities with partners. CDC has deployed several teams of public health experts to the West Africa region and plans to send additional public health experts to the affected countries to expand current response activities.

If an ill traveler arrives in the U.S., CDC has protocols in place to protect against further spread of disease. These protocols include having the airline crew notify CDC of ill travelers on a plane before arrival, evaluation of ill travelers, and isolation and transport to a medical facility if needed. CDC has issued a Health Alert Notice reminding U.S. healthcare workers about the importance of taking steps to prevent the spread of this virus, how to test and isolate patients with suspected cases, and how to protect themselves from infection.

Infection Control

Can hospitals in the United States care for an Ebola patient?

Any U.S. hospital that is following CDC's infection control recommendations and can isolate a patient in their own room with a private bathroom is capable of safely managing a patient with Ebola.

Travelers

What is being done to prevent ill travelers in West Africa from getting on a plane?

In West Africa: CDC is working with airlines, airports, and ministries of health to provide technical assistance for the development of exit screening and travel restrictions in the affected areas.

During Travel: CDC works with international public health organizations, other federal agencies, and the travel industry to identify sick travelers arriving in the United States and takes public health actions to prevent the spread of communicable diseases. Airlines are required to report to CDC any deaths onboard or ill travelers meeting certain criteria before arriving into the US, and CDC and its partners determine whether any public health action is needed. If a traveler is infectious or exhibiting symptoms during or after a flight, CDC will conduct an investigation of exposed travelers and work with the airline, federal partners, and state and local health departments to notify them and take any necessary public health action. When CDC receives a report of an ill traveler on a cruise or cargo ship, CDC officials work with the shipping line to make an assessment of public health risk and to coordinate any necessary response.

In the United States: CDC has staff working 24/7 at 20 Border Health field offices located in international airports and land borders. CDC staff are ready 24/7 to investigate cases of ill travelers on planes and ships entering the United States. CDC works with partners at all ports of entry into the United States to help prevent infectious diseases from being introduced and spread in the United States

Relatively few of the approximately 350 million travelers who enter the United States each year come from countries that have Ebola patients. Secondly, most people who become infected with Ebola are those who live with or care for people who have already caught the disease and are showing symptoms

For more information:

<http://www.austintexas.gov/article/ebola-information-and-resources>

<http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/>