Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress

The Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (CSTS) is part of the Department of Psychiatry, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences

Ebola: Facts for Maintaining Your Health

What is Ebola? Where does it come from?

Ebola is an infectious disease caused by the Ebola virus. It is *rare* but causes severe illness. The first documented case was in Africa in 1976. Ebola viruses are thought to originally come from wild animals in Africa such as chimpanzees, gorillas, and bats. Ebola is not easily transmitted. Transmission of Ebola is by direct contact from person-to-person or direct contact with infected animals. People can only spread the disease to others after they begin feeling ill, not before. The risk of catching Ebola in the general population is very low.

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What are the symptoms of Ebola?

Flu like symptoms with a sudden onset of:

- Fever
- Weakness
- Headache
- Muscle and joint pain
- Vomiting and diarrhea

Other symptoms can include:

- Rash
- Red eyes
- Cough
- Chest pain
- Difficulty swallowing
- Bleeding inside and outside the body

How does a person become infected? How does the disease spread?

The risk for transmission is low in the initial stages of patients with symptoms. The Ebola virus is not transmitted in the air. Ebola virus is spread by direct contact with:

- Blood and other body fluids such as vomit, urine, diarrhea, sweat, semen, and breast milk of an infected person or someone who has recently died from Ebola.
- Surfaces or objects contaminated by body fluids of an infected person. This includes clothing and/or bedding.
- Unprotected sexual contact with a person who has recently recovered from Ebola. Studies have shown that the virus may be present in semen up to three months after recovery.
- Handling dead wild animals or "bush meat" in Africa.

How do you treat Ebola?

- People who have symptoms should seek heath care immediately.
- There currently is no vaccine to prevent Ebola. Research on vaccine and drug therapy is ongoing.
- Treatment is supportive, meaning patients are treated in the hospital to relieve symptoms. There is no specific treatment or medicine that cures Ebola.

How can I protect myself from Ebola infection?

- Avoid contact with patients who are infected; specifically contact with body fluids and blood.
- Wash your hands often using soap or an antiseptic.
- Talk to your healthcare provider if you plan to travel to areas with Ebola outbreaks.
- If you develop symptoms within 3 weeks of returning from an area where Ebola is active, contact your health care provider immediately. Tell them where you traveled and any known exposure to Ebola.

Additional Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Ebola Website:
http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/

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