

EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE

Human pathogen information sheet

What is Ebola virus disease?

Ebola virus disease (EVD) is a serious infectious disease caused by an ebolavirus. The disease can progress as a viral haemorrhagic fever (haemorrhagic = causing bleeding), resulting in blood loss. Major outbreaks of Ebola virus disease first occurred in 1976 in Sudan and DR Congo, in a village near the Ebola river, after which the virus is now named. Depending on the viral type, the disease proves fatal in 25–90% of cases. In March 2014, the largest outbreak to date occurred in Guinea, and has now spread to other parts of West Africa.

How is Ebola virus disease transmitted?

Person-to-person

The pathogen is transmitted via *direct contact with blood and other bodily fluids* such as sweat, saliva, faeces or urine from sick people or people who have died from the disease. There is a risk of infection only if individuals show signs of having the disease. Unprotected sexual intercourse with men who have survived the disease carries a risk of infection via their seminal fluid for up to 3 months after recovery, as pathogens are detectable during this period. There is no evidence to date of airborne transmission of the disease.

From animals to humans

A transmission of the virus from infected *wild animals* to people was the likely starting point of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. Fruit bats are the pathogen's most likely natural reservoir. There is a risk of infection from direct contact with the blood or other bodily fluids from infected wild animals – whether alive or dead – and from fruit bats and apes in particular. In Africa, animal-human transmission of the virus is also possible by the *preparation and consumption of uncooked wild animal meat, food that is also known as "bushmeat"*. Animals who are native to Germany do not carry any ebolaviruses.

What symptoms do the patients show?

The disease develops as a sudden fever, accompanied by a pronounced feeling of weakness, headaches and muscle pain, sore throat, conjunctivitis and nausea. Skin rashes also occur in some patients. As the disease progresses, patients suffer from vomiting and diarrhoea, as well as liver and kidney malfunctions. Other symptoms may include both internal and external bleeding. In serious cases, the kidneys, liver and other organs may fail, often proving fatal for the patient.

What's the incubation period – and how long are you infectious?

The period of time between the appearance of symptoms and an infection with ebolaviruses is at least 2 days and no more than 21 days; 8–10 days is a typical period. Patients are infectious once they develop signs of having the disease and remain so while they have a fever. For a male patient, viruses may be present in seminal fluid for up to 3 months after he recovers.

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Who is most at risk?

- ▶ People having *close contact with someone who is suffering from or has died from Ebola virus disease* – such as family members or medical personnel – are at risk of infection. This applies in particular in cases where protective measures are inadequate.
- ▶ Spreading of the disease by people – whether natives or travellers – from affected regions cannot be excluded, but is unlikely. In Germany, strict regulations are applied to isolate and care for patients safely, so as to prevent the disease spreading in the general population.

What should I do if someone falls ill?

- ▶ *To date, no cases of Ebola virus disease have occurred in Germany.*
- ▶ There is no specific treatment for the disease. If complications occur, patients will require intensive care. As an emergency measure, the World Health Organisation (WHO) is in some cases permitting the use of drugs still undergoing medical trials.

How can I protect myself?

- ▶ In Germany, there is no need to take personal precautions against Ebola virus disease.
- ▶ There is no vaccine for Ebola virus disease.
- ▶ People currently visiting regions affected by Ebola virus disease should inform themselves about the necessary precautions/hygienic measures and recommendations for people returning from abroad.
- ▶ The German Foreign Office is currently advising against all travel to affected regions in West Africa and calling on visitors to leave such countries.

Where can I find out more?

Your local health authority can provide you with further advice and information. The Federal Association of Public Health Service Medical Practitioners (BVÖGD, www.aerzte-oegd.de) has prepared a fact sheet for airline passengers.

For up-to-date information in English on the current outbreak situation, please visit the WHO website (www.who.int/ebola) or the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (www.ecdc.europa.eu).

Further information (for medical professionals) and recent risk assessments can be found on the Robert Koch Institute website (www.rki.de/ebola).

Please also follow the advice for travellers to affected countries provided by the German Foreign Office (www.auswaertiges-amt.de) and the corresponding bulletin (www.auswaertiges-amt.de/Reisemedizin).



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Editor:
Federal Centre for Health Education, Cologne.
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Drawn up in cooperation with the Bundesverband der Ärztinnen und Ärzte des Öffentlichen Gesundheitsdienstes e.V. and in coordination with the Robert Koch-Institute.

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