

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS - EBOLA

TELL ME ABOUT EBOLA



What is Ebola?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Ebola virus is the cause of a viral hemorrhagic fever disease.

Symptoms include: Fever, headache, joint and muscle aches, weakness, diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain, lack of appetite, and abnormal bleeding. Symptoms may appear anywhere from 2 to 21 days after exposure to the Ebola virus, though 8 to 10 days is most common.

Infographic Source: Adapted from CDC by the Ohio Department of Health

Can Ebola be transmitted through the air?

No. Ebola is not a respiratory disease like the flu, so it is not transmitted through the air.

Can I get Ebola from contaminated food or water?

No. Ebola is not a food-borne illness. It is not a water-borne illness.

Can I get Ebola from a person who is infected but doesn't have any symptoms?

No. Individuals who are not symptomatic are not contagious. In order for the virus to be transmitted, an individual would have to have direct contact with an individual who is experiencing symptoms.

How is Ebola transmitted?

Ebola is transmitted by direct contact - specifically through contact of broken skin or mucous membranes (eyes, nose, mouth) - with body fluid of an infected person who is exhibiting symptoms.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), those at higher risk of infection are:

- health workers;
- family members or others in close contact with infected people;
- mourners who have direct contact with the bodies of the deceased as part of burial ceremonies.

TELL ME ABOUT MY RISKS AS AN EMPLOYEE

Are postal workers at risk for exposure to Ebola through the mail?

The Universal Postal Union believes there is currently no significant risk of Ebola being transmitted by mail.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 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.

People also can become sick with Ebola after coming in contact with infected wildlife. For example, in Africa, Ebola may spread as a result of handling wild animals hunted for food and contact with infected bats. The virus also can be spread through contact with objects (like clothes, bedding, needles, syringes/sharps or medical equipment) that have been contaminated with the virus or with infected animals.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), all the Ebola cases detected to date outside of the affected countries are clearly linked to direct exposure to symptomatic patients. This, in itself, strongly suggests that the risk of transmission by mail is extremely low, if it exists at all.

What about saliva on envelopes?

The Universal Postal Union (UPU) has also received inquiries about the possibility of receiving mail contaminated with fluids, and the risk of exposure for postal employees. Based on the current understanding of Ebola virus transmission and its survival in the environment, the UPU states that this risk is extremely low or non-existent.

The UPU adds that it is extremely improbable that the Ebola virus would survive the rigors of transport. For example, even if the virus could be detected in the saliva of a very sick Ebola patient who had licked an envelope that was subsequently inducted into the mail stream, the saliva on the envelope would dry quickly, making it extremely difficult for the virus to survive, especially given the transmission times and transport conditions involved.

In the light of these factors, the UPU believes there is currently no significant risk of Ebola being transmitted by mail. The UPU will, however, continue to monitor the situation.

Are packages from Africa a risk?

Packages should not pose a risk. Ebola virus is spread through direct contact with blood or body fluids (such as urine or saliva) from an infected person. Packages visibly soiled with blood or body fluids should not be handled. Cargo handlers and others handling mail and packages should wash their hands frequently to prevent infectious diseases.

As always, in the event of suspicious package, follow suspicious mail procedures.

- *Recommended* -- [Poster 286](#) or the USPS National Preparedness website which includes posters and downloadable videos for employees. That site is:
<http://blue.usps.gov/nationalpreparedness/np-suspicious-mail.htm>

We see birds from Africa in the mail. Any special precautions needed?

In keeping with the International Mail Manual, all packages that contain animal products and byproducts including meats, plants, plant products, soil, plant pests, and plant material used for packing, are subject to agricultural quarantine inspection by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

A fellow employee is going to Africa shortly. Should we observe special precautions when that person returns?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) encourages all travelers to Africa to pay attention to their health. This includes:

- Monitor your health for 21 days if you were in an area with an Ebola outbreak, especially if you were in contact with blood or body fluids, items that have come in contact with blood or body fluids, animals or raw meat, or hospitals where Ebola patients are being treated or participated in burial rituals.
- Seek medical care immediately if you develop fever (temperature of 100.4°F/ 38.0°C or higher) and any of the following symptoms: headache, muscle pain, diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain, or unexplained bruising or bleeding.
- Tell your doctor about your recent travel and your symptoms before you go to the office or emergency room. Advance notice will help your doctor care for you and protect other people who may be in the office.
- Postal employees who travel to impacted areas should monitor their health accordingly.

I am still very concerned.

For more information on medical conditions, check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website, at www.cdc.gov. This site provides resources on diseases in the news, as well as ongoing health concerns like the flu, heart disease, motor vehicle accident injuries, children's illnesses, and more.

For specific questions about your own health, consult your personal physician.

If you or family members are facing a medical challenge, remember the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) also is available. You can be put in touch with a counselor by calling 800-EAP-4-YOU, or TTY for the hearing impaired, 877-492-7341.

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