Ebola Virus Disease

Ebola virus disease is a rare disease caused by the Ebola virus.

In some people, Ebola virus causes symptoms similar to influenza virus, such as fevers, headache, muscle pains, vomiting, or diarrhea. In other people, it causes severe illness with bruising, bleeding, and failure of many organs in the body, eventually leading to death.

How Is Ebola Spread?
The Ebola virus was initially spread to humans through contact with animals such as monkeys, chimpanzees, and bats. In some cases, the Ebola virus can be spread from person to person through direct contact. This can happen when certain body fluids (such as blood, urine, stool, saliva, or vomit) of someone who has Ebola virus disease come into contact with the broken skin, the eyes, or the mouth of someone who is not infected. Spread through sexual contact is also possible.

2014 Outbreak in West Africa
The current 2014 outbreak of Ebola virus disease in West Africa is the largest outbreak of the disease in history. As of October 2, 2014, there have been more than 3000 deaths from the disease. Currently, the mortality rate of Ebola virus disease is estimated to be about 50%, meaning about half of infected patients recover and the other half die of the disease. Aside from supportive care in the hospital (such as giving fluids and nutrition to patients when needed), there is no specific treatment for Ebola virus disease. No vaccine is currently available.

The countries most affected by the current Ebola virus disease outbreak are Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia, and Nigeria, all in West Africa. A major reason why the outbreak is worse than previous ones in Central Africa is because this outbreak has involved more urban areas. Also, many infected patients are cared for in hospitals or at home by healthcare workers who do not have access to proper protective equipment such as gloves, gowns, and eye goggles. In addition, the African ritual of washing deceased bodies at funerals in preparation for burial increases the amount of direct contact with Ebola victims, which increases the chance of family members becoming infected.

Should You Be Concerned?
The risk of an Ebola outbreak in the United States is very low. Currently, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends avoiding travel to the affected countries in West Africa. Travel to other countries in Africa has not been restricted. In general, the risk among travelers of getting Ebola virus disease is very low unless they are spending time inside a hospital having direct contact with infected patients.

The CDC has been working closely with US Customs and Border Protection, airlines, and cargo ships to help ensure that the chance of Ebola virus being brought into the United States is very low. According to the CDC, the current outbreak does not pose a major risk to the United States. For the latest updates on the current Ebola virus disease outbreak, visit the CDC website below.

Facts About Ebola in the United States

Adapted from a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention infographic.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola

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