

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: EBOLA

Updated November 17, 2014

Note: New information is in **RED**

### ABOUT EBOLA

#### What is Ebola?

Ebola virus disease is a severe, often deadly illness that affects humans and non-human primates (monkeys, gorillas and chimpanzees). The disease most often causes fevers of 101.5°F or higher, severe headache, muscle pain, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain and unexplained bleeding or bruising.

#### What are the symptoms of Ebola?

Signs and symptoms can appear anywhere from two to 21 days after being exposed to the Ebola virus, but they most commonly begin within eight to 10 days after exposure.

Symptoms usually include:

- Fever
- Severe headache
- Muscle pain
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Stomach pain
- Unexplained bleeding or bruising

#### Who is most at risk of getting Ebola?

Health care professionals who take care of Ebola patients – as well as family and friends in close contact with Ebola patients – have the highest risk of getting the disease because they might come in direct contact with the blood or body fluids of those with the virus.

#### How does Ebola spread?

The Ebola virus is spread by **directly touching** an infected person or animal's skin, blood or body fluids. **You cannot get Ebola simply by being near someone who is infected** – it is not spread through the air or in water. People are only contagious *after* they begin to have symptoms, such as fever.

Since the Ebola virus can survive on surfaces for a short period of time, people can also get it by touching objects (like needles or bed sheets) that have been contaminated by infected blood or body fluids.

#### How is Ebola treated?

There is currently no vaccine or medicine that has been proven to cure Ebola. People who have the disease are treated for individual disease symptoms as they appear. For instance, if used early in the illness, the following treatments can improve someone's chances of survival: providing fluids; maintaining oxygen levels and blood pressure; and treating other infections if they occur.

### **Can someone who survives Ebola still spread the virus?**

**Once someone recovers from Ebola, they can no longer spread the virus.** However, Ebola has been found in semen for up to three months after someone recovers from the disease. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advises people who recover from Ebola to either not have sex or use condoms for three months after getting better.

## **THE EBOLA OUTBREAK**

### **Where has Ebola been reported?**

Ebola viruses are found in several African countries. They are not naturally found in the United States. Africa is currently experiencing an outbreak of the disease in the western countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

On September 30, 2014, the United States confirmed its first case of Ebola in a person who had traveled to Dallas, Texas from Liberia. Referred to as the “index patient”, the individual did not have symptoms when leaving West Africa, but developed symptoms approximately four days after arriving in the U.S. and subsequently died from the illness.

Since the first case of Ebola was confirmed in the U.S., three additional people have tested positive for the disease and have fully recovered.



Ebola can **ONLY** be spread by directly touching an infected person or animal’s skin, blood or body fluids – **you cannot get the virus simply by being near someone who is infected.**

### **How can I protect myself against Ebola?**

**If you are in or plan to travel to any of the West African countries (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea) affected by the Ebola outbreak, you can protect yourself by doing the following:**

- Washing hands frequently
- Avoiding contact with anyone’s blood and body fluids – particularly someone who is sick
- Avoiding West African hospitals where Ebola patients are being treated
- Not handling items that may contain an infected person’s blood or body fluids
- Not touching the body of someone who has died from Ebola
- Not touching bats, monkeys, gorillas or chimpanzees or their blood and fluids
- Not eating “bushmeat” (wild animals that are hunted for food)
- Seeking medical care immediately if you develop [Ebola symptoms](#)

**\*It should be noted that CDC advises against non essential travel.**

**<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices>.**

### **What should I do if I think I might have Ebola?**

The only people at risk in the current outbreak are those who traveled to Guinea, Liberia or Sierra Leone in the past three weeks **and** might have had direct contact with a person showing symptoms or an animal infected with Ebola.

**If you recently traveled from one of the affected African countries and develop fever within three weeks after leaving that country, seek medical care right away and tell your doctor about your recent travel. Make sure you call the doctor's office or emergency room before going and tell them about your recent travel and symptoms so that arrangements can be made, if needed, to prevent others from becoming sick.**

### **What is the Department of Health doing to prepare for Ebola?**

There is tremendous communication and planning happening in Pennsylvania concerning Ebola. Protecting the public's health and safety is our top priority.

We are focused on ensuring that our processes and protocols are as stringent as they can possibly be, that we are making any adjustments needed based on lessons learned from the current U.S. cases, and that we are in full coordination with our public health system and local partners to help ensure that they, too, are armed with information and ready to respond to a case, should we have one in the commonwealth.

The Department of Health (DOH) remains in constant communication with the CDC, our sister agencies in the state including the Departments of Environmental Protection and Transportation (DEP, PennDOT), the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA), our state lab, our county and municipal health departments, hospitals, and other essential partners.

### **Pennsylvania's monitoring of travelers from Ebola-affected West African countries**

Pennsylvania is one of six states that have been directed by the CDC to actively monitor all travelers from the West African countries of Guinea, Liberia, **Mali** and Sierra Leone who arrive at five designated airports in the U.S. and then travel into the commonwealth.

The Pennsylvania Department of Health will monitor travelers staying in any of the state's 67 counties that do not have local health departments. Travelers who stay in counties that have local health departments will be monitored on the local level.

Travelers from West Africa who are visiting Pennsylvania will be monitored daily for 21 days. A "Passenger Symptom Follow-Up Diary" will be used to track information like whether or not an individual has fever or other Ebola symptoms, whether they will be traveling within or outside of Pennsylvania, etc.

The department will post the number of travelers that are being monitored in Pennsylvania each Monday afternoon.



**Where can I get more information about Ebola?**

Any questions or concerns regarding Ebola can be directed to the department's toll-free helpline – 1-877-PA-HEALTH.

Information and materials are also available on the department's website at [www.health.state.pa.us](http://www.health.state.pa.us).

Additional Ebola information is available on the CDC's website at: [www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola](http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola).