Factsheet

Ebola virus disease and low-risk close contacts

Ebola virus disease (EVD) is a severe, often fatal illness, with a case fatality rate of up to 90%. It is one of the world's most virulent diseases. The infection is transmitted by direct contact with the blood, body fluids and tissues of infected animals or people. Close contacts are asked to closely monitor their health for up to 21 days after contact.

Last updated: 07 September 2016

Information for people who may have had close contact with a case

You have been identified as a person that may have had close contact with a person who may have Ebola Virus Disease (EVD). This fact sheet provides information about the disease and what you need to do now.

The risk of acquiring EVD is very low unless there has been direct physical contact with the bodily fluids of an infected person or animal (alive or dead). While you may have had close contact with someone who may have EVD, the risk of acquiring EVD is still low because you were not known to have had direct contact with their bodily fluids.

What should I do to monitor my health and for how long?

Public health unit staff will be in contact with you to provide information and to help you monitor your health. You should monitor yourself for fever by taking and recording your temperature twice a day for 21 days after your last contact with the ill person. You should also monitor yourself for any other symptoms of EVD, as described below.

What should I do if I become unwell?

If you have a fever, or start to feel any other symptoms compatible with EVD, you should report immediately to the public health unit in your state or territory.

If you are very unwell, seek medical attention first and tell the doctor/hospital or ambulance service you have been identified as a close contact of a confirmed / probable case of EVD.

As far as possible, you should avoid direct physical contact with any other person, until you have been told that it is okay to do so by your doctor or the public health unit.

What are the symptoms?

EVD can cause a serious illness, with a sudden onset of fever, muscle and joint aches, weakness, and headache. The next stage is characterised by vomiting, diarrhoea, rash and malfunction of liver and kidneys.

Some cases present with profuse internal and external bleeding and progress to multi-organ failure. Between 50 and 90% of people infected with EVD in outbreaks in Africa have died of the disease.

How is it spread?

Ebola is introduced into the human population through close contact with the blood, secretions, organs or other bodily fluids of infected animals (e.g. through hunting or preparation of "bushmeat").

Ebola virus then spreads from person to person via contact with the blood, secretions, or other bodily fluids of infected people, and contact with environments contaminated with such fluid, including in healthcare settings.

Transmission through sexual contact may occur up to three months after clinical recovery. Airborne transmission is not known to occur.

Traditional burial ceremonies conducted in affected areas of Africa are a known high risk activity for transmission

What is Ebola virus disease (EVD)?

EVD is a serious and often fatal disease caused by a virus. There are several strains of the virus. EVD was previously called Ebola haemorrhagic fever.

Fruit bats are considered to be the natural host of Ebola viruses, with outbreaks amongst other species such as chimpanzees, gorillas, monkeys and forest antelope from time to time. There have been 24 outbreaks of Ebola Virus in Africa since the virus was first identified in 1976. While there is evidence of one strain of Ebola Virus being present in animal populations in some parts of Asia, there have been no reports of human illness outside of Africa.

Who is at risk?

People who are living in or travelling to affected areas of Africa may be at risk of infection; however, the risk of infection is extremely low unless there has been direct contact with the bodily fluids of an infected person or animal (alive or dead).

Caring for ill relatives is a known risk factor for infection, and healthcare workers, particularly those in resource poor settings with inadequate infection control are also at risk.

How is it prevented?

Good hygiene and infection control around EVD cases is the only way to prevent spread of disease. There is no vaccine for EVD. Hunting and contact with "bushmeat" in affected areas should be avoided.

How is it diagnosed?

EVD is diagnosed by a blood test that detects the virus in blood. Urine and/or a swab from throat or nose may also be examined to look for the virus. Testing for EVD is done in a public health laboratory with special biosafety facilities.

How is it treated?

There is currently no specific treatment for people who are sick with EVD, but general intensive medical care can be life-saving.

What is the public health response?

Special procedures to prevent the spread of EVD are in place to manage the situation in the event there is a case of EVD in Australia. These include:

- Doctors and laboratories are required to notify state/territory health departments of any suspect cases.
- Isolation of suspect cases from other people.
- Identification of people who have been in contact with the case by Public Health authorities so that these people are information about the risk of infection and monitored for any signs or symptoms of the disease.
- Special safety guidelines including wearing protective equipment to prevent spread of Ebola Virus to health- care workers managing cases and laboratory staff handling specimens.

Public health unit staff will investigate all cases to find out how the infection occurred, identify other people at risk of infection, implement control measures and provide other advice.

How do I contact the relevant public health unit?

In NSW, call **1300 066 055** to get through to your local public health unit. The public health unit may also provide you with an additional number to call to report if you are unwell.

Further information

- World Health Organization (WHO) - EVD Updates - http://www.who.int/csr/disease
- Australian Department of Health - EVD website https://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-ebola.htm
- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) EVD website http://www.cdc.gov/
- Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Smart traveller website http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/