

Ebola Virus: Questions and Answers

Information for Parents and Guardians

What is Ebola?

Ebola, previously known as Ebola hemorrhagic fever, is a severe, often fatal disease in humans and nonhuman primates (such as monkeys, gorillas, and chimpanzees). Ebola is a rare and deadly disease caused by infection with a virus of the family Filoviridae, genus Ebolavirus.

How is Ebola spread?

The virus is transmitted through direct contact with the blood or secretions of an infected person, or exposure to objects (such as needles) that have been contaminated with infected secretions. It is not spread through the air, water, or food.

What are the symptoms and signs?

Symptoms are non-specific and may include fever, rash, joint and muscle aches, diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain, lack of appetite, rash, sore throat, and cough. More serious presentations include chest pain, difficulty swallowing, difficulty breathing and bleeding inside and outside of the body. Symptoms may appear anywhere from 2 to 21 days after exposure to Ebola though 8-10 days is most common.

What areas are being affected by Ebola?

Many people may think of the entire continent of Africa being affected. In reality, very particular areas of western Africa have uncontrolled Ebola outbreaks – mainly the countries of Liberia, Sierra Leon, and Guinea. The case in the Dallas, TX is being heavily monitored and has not increased the likelihood of seeing cases in our community.

What are the risks for Ebola here in Pima County?

Pima County has not experienced any cases of Ebola and even with the case that has occurred in Texas, the risk to our community remains very low. While it is important for our front line medical facilities and staff to stay alert, the members of this community are at very low risk for Ebola due to the low occurrence of international travelers from affected regions in West Africa. Added is the fact that a person must be symptomatic in order to spread or transmit the disease and they must have direct contact with an infected, symptomatic person's body fluids.

Many illnesses circulate in schools. Are students at higher risk?

The people with a real risk of getting Ebola are people who have traveled to the West African countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea. Students in our communities' schools are much more likely to be exposed to diseases that are present in our community like influenza.

Are schools doing anything to be prepared for a child sick with Ebola in my child's school?

Every school will have different plans that fit their specific needs. Pima County Health Department has provided them guidance on things they should keep in mind even though Ebola is not in our community. Mainly we have recommended that:

A staff member or student who becomes ill at school should not be considered "at risk" if they;

- have not traveled to Ebola affected areas in the past 21 days,
- do not have a family member/close contact with recent travel to an Ebola affected area,
- and do not have a fever with vomiting, diarrhea, or other symptoms.

If a child shows up in a school setting with fever and one of the associated symptoms, we have asked that the school complete a travel history inquiry with a parent or guardian. We only recommend being concerned about Ebola if the student has traveled to affected areas in the last 21 days or is in close contact with someone who has symptoms and has traveled to an affected area in the 21 days.

What are healthcare professionals doing to prepare?

We practice infection control and conduct disease investigations everyday – no matter what the illness is or where it comes from. We diligently work with our healthcare and public health partners to be prepared for public health threats and have protocols in place at every level to protect the health and safety of the public.

What happens if someone is diagnosed with Ebola?

If there is reason to believe a person has Ebola, the patient is isolated in a hospital setting and public health professionals notified. Samples from the patient can then be collected and tested by a specialized lab to confirm infection.

What is the treatment for Ebola?

Standard treatment for Ebola is limited to supportive therapy: providing treatment for symptoms and treating them for any complicating infections.

Where can I get more information about Ebola in the U.S.?

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Ebola webpage is constantly being updated with new information as it becomes available. Follow the link or type in <http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/>