



Information for frequent travellers to Ebola-affected countries in West Africa

Current outbreak

There is a large outbreak of Ebola virus disease occurring in West Africa – the largest outbreak ever reported. Although cases have occurred in several countries in West Africa, the most affected are Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Those most at risk of infection are people caring for an infected person, such as relatives of Ebola cases, and medical staff looking after them. Mourners have also caught Ebola during the funeral of an infected person, through touching the body and other ritual practices.

As a frequent traveller to an Ebola affected country, although the overall risk of acquiring the infection is low, please be aware of the following advice and recommendations.

How Ebola is spread

Ebola can spread from animals to people through close contact with the blood or body fluids of an infected animal, commonly when slaughtering, handling or consuming the meat of wild animals (bush meat).

In outbreaks, the virus spreads from person to person through direct contact (through broken skin or through your eyes, nose or mouth) with the blood or body fluids (this includes vomit, faeces, urine, saliva and semen) of an infected person.

It can also be spread via contact with objects such as soiled clothing and bedding that are contaminated with the blood or body fluids of an infected person.

What to do before you travel:

- see your GP for general advice on travel health (ideally six weeks before), including malaria prevention and making sure that your vaccines are up to date
- make sure you have adequate travel insurance or other means to pay for healthcare should you fall ill
- follow guidance/advice from the organisation you are travelling on behalf of

Preventive measures

The overall risk of being infected with Ebola during your visit to an Ebola-affected country is low but your risk does depend on the areas of the country that you will be visiting and the types of activities that you will be doing while you are there. You can find out the latest information on areas where Ebola is currently being transmitted from the World Health Organization website at <http://apps.who.int/ebola/en/ebola-situation-reports> or from maps on the GOV.UK website at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ebola-virus-disease-clinical-management-and-guidance#maps-locations-and-outbreaks>. The risk of infection is obviously higher in these areas.

However, there are some important measures you can take to minimise your risk of getting Ebola:

- wash your hands regularly with soap and water, especially after visiting the toilet and before eating. If access to soap and clean water is limited, hand sanitisers may be used as long as your hands are not visibly dirty
- practise safe sex, including the use of barrier contraception such as condoms, as Ebola virus is present in semen for at least three months after apparent recovery from the illness
- do not touch the body of a deceased person or take part in funeral rituals as the person may have died of Ebola
- avoid contact with animals (such as bats or monkeys) or with raw or undercooked meat
- do not eat or handle bush-meat (wild animals hunted for food)

If you become unwell

The time from exposure to when signs or symptoms of the infection appear (the incubation period) is two to 21 days. If you feel unwell with symptoms such as fever ($\geq 37.5^{\circ}\text{C}$), chills, muscle aches, headaches, vomiting, stomach pain, diarrhoea, unexplained bleeding or bruising, sore throat or rash within 21 days of leaving an affected country, you should call 111 (if in the UK) and explain that you have recently visited Guinea, Liberia or Sierra Leone.

If you have already returned to Guinea, Liberia or Sierra Leone (or any other country) and develop any of the above symptoms, you should visit a healthcare provider immediately. Your travel insurance company can help you find a healthcare provider in the area.

There are other illnesses (flu, typhoid fever and malaria) that have similar symptoms in the early stages, so it is important to be seen by a doctor who can determine what might be causing your symptoms and carry out relevant tests. Explain to the doctor that you have recently visited Guinea, Liberia or Sierra Leone.

Airport screening

As you are travelling to and from an Ebola-affected country, you will be screened at airports, both as you exit the affected country and on arrival in the UK. When you return to the UK, screening staff will ask you a number of health and activity questions and may take your temperature.

As a returnee from an Ebola-affected country, you will then be placed in a category, either 1, 2 or 3, and will need to follow the relevant advice for 21 days following your return to the UK.

Category 1: If you have been assigned to this category, this means that you have visited an Ebola-affected area but had no direct contact with an Ebola case (dead or alive) or their body fluids. The risk of infection is very low and you can carry on with your normal activities. However, if you start to feel unwell in the 21 days following your return, you should monitor your temperature and if this is equal to or higher than 37.5°C, you should telephone the NHS 111 service for further advice.

Category 2: If you have been assigned to category 2, the risk of infection is low. You will be contacted by the local PHE team on your return and they will advise you as to what activities and work you are able to undertake in the following 21 days. You will be asked to monitor your temperature twice a day (please see section on use of medicine below) and if this is equal to or higher than 37.5°C then you should report this to your designated PHE contact. They will also advise you as to any other precautions you should take.

Category 3: If you have been assigned to category 3, this means that you have had direct contact with a case while this person had symptoms and were potentially exposed to body fluids. This includes kissing and sexual contact. The risk of infection is high. You will be contacted by the local PHE team on your return and they will advise you as to what activities and work you are able to undertake in the following 21 days. You will be asked to monitor your temperature twice a day (please see section on use of medicine below) and to report your temperature to your designated

PHE contact by noon each day. They will also advise you as to any other precautions you should take.

Use of medicines such as aspirin, paracetamol or ibuprofen

Certain medicines can have the effect of reducing body temperature during a fever (antipyretic). Medicine with an antipyretic, including aspirin, paracetamol or ibuprofen, can lower your body temperature for up to 8 hours. Therefore, for up to 8 hours after taking an antipyretic, thermometer measurements may show a lower temperature than would be expected due to the effect of the antipyretic.

You must make contact with your designated local PHE contact if you need to take such a medicine for further advice. Please take your temperature before you take aspirin, paracetamol or ibuprofen, and if it is 37.5°C or higher then you must contact your designated PHE contact immediately.

A temperature of 37.5°C is always significant, whether you are taking one of these medicines or not, and must be reported urgently.

Further sources of information

General travel health information and advice: <http://www.nathnac.org>

Regularly updated information from PHE about Ebola (including the Ebola Outbreak Distribution Map):

<https://phe.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Viewer/index.html?appid=6b47b738f1cc40c688eff341544c1c5a>

Ebola: Travellers returning from West Africa poster:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/ebola-travellers-returning-from-west-africa-poster

www.gov.uk/search?q=ebola

www.gov.uk/ebola-health-guidance

World Health Organization <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/en/>

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