



Department
for Transport



Public Health
England

West Africa Ebola Outbreak Guidance to UK Ports & Shipping Operators

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Purpose of Document

This document offers general guidance for minimising the risk to seafarers, port workers, passengers and others in the maritime environment, from the current outbreak of Ebola in West Africa.

Instructions from company medical advisors, port medical officers or public health authorities should always take primacy over the advice in this document. If you have any concerns, please contact your manager.

General Background

There is currently an outbreak of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) occurring in West Africa. This is already the largest known outbreak of this disease worldwide. The current list of Affected Countries can be found below.

Ebola is a rare but serious viral infection, spread person to person by direct contact with blood and body fluids of infected people. It does not transmit through the air. The incubation period is 2-21 days and there is negligible risk of transmission during the incubation period (i.e. before symptoms appear). Ebola virus is easily killed by soap or bleach and survives only a short time on dry surfaces or those exposed to sunlight.

Ebola virus is not spread through routine, social contact (such as shaking hands) with asymptomatic individuals. The likelihood of contracting any viral haemorrhagic fever (VHF), including Ebola, is considered very low unless there has been a specific exposure. Ebola transmission has commonly been between family members with

close contact to infected individuals and health care workers with extremely close contact to patients or body fluids. Infection occurs from direct contact (through broken skin or mucous membranes) with the blood, or other body fluids (such as stool, urine, saliva, semen) of infected people.

As with other infectious diseases, one of the most important preventive measures is frequent hand-washing with soap and water, or use alcohol-based hand rubs containing at least 60 percent alcohol when soap and water aren't available. However, it is important to remember that if hands are visibly soiled, then alcohol hand rubs are not sufficient and washing with soap and water is needed.

When travelling abroad, it is important to take sensible precautions against the many more common health risks prevalent in the region, such as malaria, HIV and Hepatitis B.

Further information can be found at:

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/ebola-virus/pages/ebola-virus.aspx>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ebola-virus-disease-clinical-management-and-guidance>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-ship-captains-medical-guide> (see Chapter 5, causes and prevention of disease)

Affected Countries (at time of issue)

The recent outbreak of the Ebola virus primarily affects 3 countries in West Africa:

Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Refer to the WHO website for further updates on the geographic extent of the outbreak:

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

Screening of Vessels arriving in UK Ports

Maritime Declarations of Health are already required for all ships arriving from a foreign port. If the maritime declaration of health reports any instances of illness, the usual procedures for infectious diseases will be followed.

In addition, Public Health England (PHE) has put in place a process to screen vessels that arrive from the affected countries. Where the ship's arrival occurs less than 21 days after leaving one of the affected countries, screening commensurate with that in place at airports will be delivered by local Health Protection Teams for the personnel on board.

Screening involves assessing people's recent travel history; who they have been in contact with and where they are going next, as well as a possible medical assessment. Medical assessments will be carried out by trained medical staff rather than Border Force staff. People will also be given advice on what to do should they develop symptoms later, again consistent with screening arrangements at airports.

Additional Sources of Information

It is advisable to check FCO and local guidance and advice on avoiding infection during the current outbreak:

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>

Currently the World Health Organization (WHO) advises states with Ebola transmission should conduct exit screening of all persons at international airports, seaports and major land crossings, for unexplained febrile illness consistent with potential Ebola infection. The exit screening should consist of, at a minimum, a questionnaire, a temperature measurement and, if there is a fever, an assessment of the risk that the fever is caused by EVD.

It is therefore recommended that the existing WHO procedures contained in their "Guidance for ships and shipping companies" should be followed.

Copies of the Guidance can be found in circular letters (Nos. 3484 & 3485) issued by the IMO, which are available through the IMO website (www.imo.org). These provide information and guidance, based on recommendations developed by WHO, on the precautions to be taken to minimize risks to seafarers, passengers and others in the maritime environment from the Ebola virus disease:

<http://www.imo.org/Documents/3484.pdf>

<http://www.imo.org/MediaCentre/HotTopics/ebola/Documents/3485.pdf>

On-line Information

Further information on dealing with the consequences of the outbreak, specifically aimed at the maritime industry, can be found on the following links:

- The UK Chamber of Shipping have set up an information page about Ebola on their website:- <http://www.ukchamberofshipping.com/news/2014/10/08/ebola-information/>
- The ICS (International Chamber of Shipping), IMEC (International Maritime Employers' Council), and the ITF (International Transport Workers' Federation) have issued a joint note on Ebola :- <http://www.ics-shipping.org/docs/default-source/Other-documents/urgent-communication-on-the-risk-of-the-ebola-virus.pdf?sfvrsn=4>

- UK P&I Club have issued a practical guidance note for seafarers on Ebola, as well as other advice on contractual and ports issues:- [http://www.ukpandi.com/fileadmin/uploads/uk-pi/LP%20Documents/UK P I Club Briefing - Ebola Outbreak.pdf](http://www.ukpandi.com/fileadmin/uploads/uk-pi/LP%20Documents/UK_P_I_Club_Briefing_-_Ebola_Outbreak.pdf)
- The Swedish P&I Club have issued advice on Ebola for shippers, including dealing with stowaways:- <http://www.safety4sea.com/swedish-club-issues-notice-re-ebola-virus-and-stowaways-21750>
- The WHO also have an updated Travel and Transport section, which is very helpful, especially the section 3.3 “Recommendations for ships” which provides guidance on managing suspected Ebola cases on board ships:- <http://www.who.int/ith/updates/20140421/en/>

If you think you may have been exposed to the Ebola virus:

If you think you have been exposed or if you develop symptoms consistent with Ebola (see links above), within 21 days of an exposure, call the NHS 111 helpline (if in the UK) or, if overseas, follow your company arrangements for seeking medical advice.