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Medical guidance - Ebola virus

As of today, there have been nearly 8000 confirmed deaths and over 20,000 probable and confirmed cases of Ebola recorded in eight countries, although widespread transmission is confined to Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea.

Public Health England (PHE), who protect the nation's health through the national health protection service and prepare for public health emergencies, say it is probable that there will be a small number of cases of travellers from the above areas arriving in to the UK who may not show any immediate signs of the disease, but could develop symptoms after their return. The time taken for the disease to show symptoms is anything from 2 to 21 days.

Who is at risk of Ebola?

The people who are at risk of acquiring the Ebola are health care workers and family members looking after Ebola cases, and those who inadvertently have contact with an infected animal or are involved with disposing or burying people who have died from the disease.

In our TfL context, the risk to our workers remains extremely low. The only employees at risk are only those who have:

- recently returned from affected countries Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mali and Congo, **AND**
- have cared for/come into contact with body fluids, such as blood, vomit, urine or faeces, from an affected individual, or a body, or animal known or strongly suspected to have Ebola.

Senegal and Nigeria have been declared Ebola free. This is because these countries implemented good public health measures to prevent the spread of Ebola.

How is it transmitted?

The virus can only be transmitted by direct contact between infected body fluid or tissues and the recipient's mucous membranes (usually eyes or mouth) or an open wound. There is no airborne transmission of Ebola virus.

Ebola is **not** spread through ordinary social contact, such as shaking hands or sitting next to someone. It is important to remember that people infected with Ebola can only spread the virus to other people **once they have developed symptoms** when all body fluids such as blood, urine, stool, vomit, sweat, saliva and semen are infectious.

How infectious is Ebola?

The likelihood of contracting Ebola is very low unless there has been a specific exposure. A fever in people who have travelled to areas with Ebola is more likely to be caused by a common infection, such as malaria or typhoid fever.

OHC Aug 2014 updated 14.10.- 21.10-11.11,- 25.11.14 and 6.1.15

Incubation period

The incubation period is the time period from contact with an infected person to when the first symptoms appear. The incubation period for Ebola is 2 to 21 days but the symptoms usually develop after 5 to 7 days.

Symptoms of Ebola

The illness usually begins suddenly with fever, headache, joint and muscle aches, and intense weakness. Diarrhoea and vomiting may occur. Some individuals develop bleeding. In severe cases patients develop failure of the liver and kidneys.

How Ebola is diagnosed

Diagnosis of Ebola requires blood tests in a specialist laboratory. Other tests may also be carried out at the same time to ensure other important infections (e.g. malaria or typhoid fever) are not missed.

What should I do if I think I have Ebola?

The risk of a traveller going to West Africa and contracting Ebola remains very low since Ebola is transmitted by direct contact with the blood or bodily fluids of an infected person. Anyone who has travelled in the affected area and is concerned should either contact their GP or NHS 111. Please do not go to your GP or A+E unless you have been told to do so by a health care professional.

TfL Occupational Health advice – routine precautions

Occupational Health advise all our staff to adopt 'universal precautions', as they would normally do in their day to day activities at work. This is good practice as there are many diseases which can be transmitted through direct contact with blood and body fluids.

By universal precautions we mean to routinely cover any cuts or exposed wounds with waterproof plasters, to avoid direct contact with any blood or body secretions, and to wear appropriate gloves if approaching any situation where there is a suspicion that there may be the possibility of contact with blood or body tissues/secretions, and to wash hands regularly with soap and water.

Screening of individuals arriving in the UK from affected countries

- The UK has screening arrangements in place at the UK's main ports of entry for people travelling from the affected regions - Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Mali, and Congo - will offer an additional level of protection to the UK
- Enhanced screening arrangements are being made for Health Care workers returning to the UK after having cared for Ebola cases.
- The Chief Medical Officer, who takes advice from Public Health England and the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, believes that it is likely we will see a handful of cases of Ebola in the UK, over the next three months
- She has confirmed that the public health risk in the UK remains low and measures currently in place - including exit screening in affected countries - offer the correct level of protection.

OHGN110 Ebola Virus

OHC Aug 2014 updated 14.10.- 21.10.-11.11, -25.11.14 and 6.1.15 everyone, guidance notes, current, OHGN110