

Ebola virus disease – Information for Victorians

February 2015

Frequently asked questions

What is the current situation?

The outbreak of Ebola virus disease (Ebola) in West Africa is now larger and more serious than any previous outbreak. The situation has developed into a humanitarian crisis, and was declared by the WHO to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 8 August 2014.

Widespread and intense transmission in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone is continuing, but the situation is stabilising. Around 70 per cent of people who have been infected with Ebola have died.

There have been some people infected with Ebola outside of West Africa and although the chances of an Ebola infected person arriving in Australia are low, there is concern.

Health authorities are closely monitoring the situation overseas and adapting and updating the health response and border measures.

The Australian Department of Health has a dedicated Ebola website where up to date information on the international and national situation is available.

<https://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-ebola.htm>

Have there been any cases in Victoria?

No. There have been no confirmed cases of Ebola in Victoria or Australia to date. The Commonwealth Government and state and territory governments are remaining vigilant as the case numbers overseas continue to rise.

It is natural to feel intensely interested and even fearful of Ebola. Health services are fully prepared in the event of a suspected or confirmed case occurring in Victoria.

What is the likelihood of an Ebola case in Victoria?

The risk of a confirmed case of Ebola in Victoria is probably low. However, as the number of cases overseas increases, the likelihood of a case appearing in Australia will increase.

What is Ebola?

Ebola is a serious and often fatal disease caused by a virus.

Fruit bats are considered to be the natural host of Ebola viruses. Outbreaks amongst other species (monkeys, antelope) have been known to occur from time to time.

There is no evidence that Ebola is present in Australian bats or any other animals in Australia.

How is Ebola spread?

Ebola is spread by direct contact (for example, by touching) body fluids of a person who is sick or died from Ebola. This includes blood, vomit, faeces (poo) and spit, sweat and semen. **There have been no known cases of Ebola being transmitted through air or water.**

What are the symptoms of Ebola?

Symptoms can include sudden onset of fever, muscle pain and headache. This is followed by vomiting, diarrhoea, and in some cases, both internal and external bleeding.

The incubation period, (the time between exposure to the disease before the first appearance of symptoms), is from 2 to 21 days. **People only become infectious once they have symptoms.** People with Ebola are not infectious during the incubation period. In West Africa, around 70 per cent of people who have been infected with Ebola have died.

Confirmation of Ebola can only be made through laboratory testing of blood, saliva (spit) or urine (pee) from an infected person.

How can I protect myself against Ebola?

- If you live in Australia, and are not travelling to West Africa, there is nothing you need to do to protect yourself as you are not at risk. There are no confirmed cases of Ebola in Australia at present.
- **Anyone planning to visit West African countries** should seek travel medical advice before departing.
- For the most up to date information refer to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade information for travellers on the Smartraveller website <www.smartraveller.gov.au/>.
- If you are travelling to West Africa, good hygiene and infection control around people with Ebola is the only way to prevent spread of disease. There is no vaccine for Ebola.
- For more information see the Australian Department of Health – Ebola website <<https://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-ebola.htm>>
- **If you have recently returned from an Ebola affected country**, follow instructions provided to you by the Department of Health & Human Services.

Who is at risk?

- Living with or caring for a person infected with Ebola is a known risk factor for infection.
- Healthcare workers, particularly those caring for Ebola patients in resource-poor settings with inadequate infection control are also at risk.
- People who are living in or travelling to affected areas of Africa may be at risk of infection; however, this risk is extremely low unless they have been directly exposed to the blood or bodily fluids of an infected person (dead or alive).
- Contact with infected animals (alive or dead), for example by eating 'bush meat' or by hunting animals in affected countries can also put you at risk.
- Having unprotected sexual contact with a person who has or had Ebola up to three months after they have recovered can put you at risk of catching Ebola.

What should I do if I become unwell after travel in areas affected by Ebola?

If you have returned to Victoria within the last 21 days from travel to Ebola-affected area and develop a fever, muscle pain, vomiting, diarrhoea or other symptoms, you should call the Victorian Department of Health & Human Services immediately on 1800 356 061.

If you become ill or feel unwell while travelling in areas affected by Ebola, you should not wait until you arrive back in Australia to seek medical assistance. Instead you should see a doctor or **go to the local emergency department wherever you are, as soon as you feel unwell.**

How is Ebola diagnosed?

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

How is Ebola treated?

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

How is Australia responding to Ebola?

For information on the federal government response, including what is happening at Australian borders see the [Australian Government Department of Health website](#).

How is Victoria responding to Ebola?

Victoria has measures in place to assess and monitor people arriving from West Africa who are at risk of having Ebola. If a local case of Ebola should be suspected and detected, Victoria is ready.

While the risk of importation of Ebola into Victoria is low, Victoria may eventually need to manage a confirmed case of Ebola.

The Department of Health & Human Services has developed the *Victorian Ebola Virus Disease Plan* which has been issued to metropolitan, regional and other health services and stakeholders including general practitioners.

The plan outlines the exact actions that will be taken by the Department of Health & Human Services, Commonwealth border agencies, Ambulance Victoria, any health service and also the two hospitals that will receive a suspected case.

The Royal Melbourne Hospital (RMH) is the designated facility for assessment and management of adult patients suspected to have Ebola and is fully prepared. Children will be sent to the Royal Children's Hospital (RCH).

Victorian health services have responsibility for ensuring all potentially involved staff are appropriately trained, informed and clear about each individual's role in the event of a suspected Ebola case presenting at any hospital or health care service.

Victoria, along with all other states and jurisdictions in Australia, and around the world, are continually reviewing any emerging evidence around risk to health care workers and we are acting to prevent any transmissions happening here.

For more information on preparedness in Victoria visit <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/emergency/ebola.htm>

Where can I find further information on Ebola?

- Department of Health & Human services, State Government of Victoria
<<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/emergency/ebola.htm>>
- World Health Organization (WHO) EVD updates available from the WHO website: <www.who.int/csr/disease/>
- Australian Department of Health – EVD website
<<https://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-ebola.htm>>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (USA) website <<http://www.cdc.gov/>>
- Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade provides information for travellers on the Smartraveller website <www.smartraveller.gov.au/>.
- Health alerts and advisories are issued by the Victorian Chief Health Officer. Ebola information specific to Victoria will be issued as required, and can be found here:
<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/chiefhealthofficer/alerts/index.htm>

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