

Ebola outbreak in West Africa

You may have heard in the news recently about an outbreak of Ebola virus disease in West Africa centred in three countries: Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Outbreaks of Ebola are nothing new and there is currently no direct threat to people in the UK from the Ebola virus, but health professionals are concerned about the size of the outbreak in West Africa.

Front line health and care staff to be extra vigilant

It is important that front line health and care staff are aware and vigilant if they come into contact with anyone who has visited areas affected by the outbreak within the last 21 days and they develop a sudden unexplained illness. More information about the Ebola virus and what to do in the event of suspecting a possible case are explained below.

What is Ebola?

Ebola is a virus (viral haemorrhagic fever) that can be spread through blood, bodily fluids and secretions of infected patients. The virus originated in the West African rainforest and is thought to have spread to humans by handling or butchering infected animals (bush meat). Once the virus enters the body it can replicate very quickly, causing a range of increasingly harmful symptoms, including internal bleeding.

How is Ebola spread?

Ebola virus is generally not spread through routine social contact such as shaking hands. The virus is not airborne, so it's not as infectious as diseases like the flu. The virus is spread in body fluids or secretions of infected patients, particularly in hospitals; as a result of unsafe burial practices; and through the use of contaminated needles, syringes and other medical devices. It is unlikely, but not impossible, that someone incubating the disease could arrive in the UK and then develop symptoms. Guidance has been issued to ports and airports. Although Public Health England assess the risk/ likelihood of imported cases as/is low, health and care staff should be vigilant.

What are the symptoms of Ebola virus?

An infected person will typically develop a sudden onset of fever (38 degrees), headache, joint and muscle pain, sore throat, and intense muscle weakness. Diarrhoea, vomiting, a rash, stomach pain and impaired kidney and liver function follow. The infected person may then bleed internally, as well as from the ears, eyes and mouth. In situations in which haemorrhagic fever is suspected, alternative diagnoses such as malaria should be considered.

What should I do if I suspect a case of Ebola?

Where ever you work, the person should be isolated and kept where they are whilst clinical advice is sought. The ambulance service will make special arrangements to transport them safely to a unit where they can be investigated and treated.

Ensuring good hygiene practices (hand washing, gloves, plastic apron and safe containment of any waste) are important immediate actions to take whilst waiting for advice.

If you visit or meet someone who has possible symptoms, the local Public Health England health protection team will provide advice on 03442253546.

Find out more

You can find out more about the Ebola virus by visiting www.nhs.uk/news

Publication of message

Email to Children's Social Care staff

Email to Adult Social Care & Health and Wellbeing staff

Email to Public Health staff

Publish message on insite (intranet) for all staff