

Texas Department of State Health Services Categorized Responses to Inquiries about Ebola – General Public

Understanding Ebola

What is Ebola?

Ebola is a disease caused by the Ebola virus that can lead to severe and often fatal disease in humans and some animals that become infected.

How is Ebola spread? /How can I get Ebola?

Ebola virus is spread through direct contact with blood and body fluids of a person who is infected with Ebola and has symptoms, or who has died from Ebola. Direct contact means that body fluids (including but not limited to urine, saliva, sweat, feces, vomit, breast milk, and semen) from an infected person have touched someone's eyes, nose, mouth, or an open cut, wound, or abrasion. Ebola virus is not spread through the air or by water. There is no evidence that mosquitoes or other insects transmit Ebola. A person infected with Ebola is only contagious after they begin to have symptoms.

What are body fluids?

Ebola virus has been found in blood and body fluids. Body fluids include saliva, mucus, vomit, feces, sweat, tears, breast milk, urine, and semen.

Can Ebola spread by coughing or sneezing?

Ebola virus is spread by direct contact with blood and body fluids of an infected person who has symptoms of Ebola disease. If a person with Ebola coughs or sneezes on someone, and saliva or mucus in that cough or sneeze come into contact with that person's eyes, nose, or mouth, these fluids may transmit the disease.

What are the signs and symptoms of Ebola?

A person infected with Ebola virus is not contagious until symptoms appear. Signs and symptoms of Ebola virus typically include:

- Fever (greater than 101.5 degrees)
- Severe headache
- Muscle pain
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Stomach pain
- Unexplained bleeding or bruising

Symptoms usually appear 8 to 10 days after exposure, but may appear anywhere from 2 to 21 days after exposure.

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Please note that these symptoms are similar to the flu – you should only consider Ebola as your illness if you have been in contact with a person with confirmed Ebola or have recently travelled to an Ebola affected area. If in doubt please call your doctor as soon as possible.

In what countries is the Ebola outbreak occurring?

Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea, all countries in West Africa, are the countries that currently have Ebola outbreaks. When travelers or patients are screened for recent travel to Ebola-affected areas, these are the three countries that are asked about. Guinea should not be confused with Equatorial Guinea or Guinea Bissau, which are different countries.

How long does Ebola live outside the body?

Ebola virus can only survive for several hours on dry surfaces (such as doorknobs and countertops). If the virus is still in a body fluid, such as blood, then it can survive up to several days at room temperature.

Reference:

<http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/transmission/gas.html>

Is there a vaccine for Ebola?

Currently, there are no FDA-approved vaccines or medicines, or antiviral drugs, which have been proven to be effective against Ebola.

Can someone who survived Ebola still spread the virus?

Ebola virus has been found in semen for up to 3 months. People who recover from Ebola are advised to abstain from sex (including oral sex) for at least three months. If abstinence is not possible, condoms may help prevent the spread of the disease.

There is not enough evidence to provide guidance on when it is safe to resume breastfeeding after a mother's recovery, unless her breast milk can be shown to be Ebola virus-free by laboratory testing. In the one case in which breast milk was tested, Ebola virus was identified in the breast milk of a lactating woman 7 and 15 days after disease onset.

Other than those methods, once someone recovers from Ebola, they can no longer spread the virus.

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What products can be used to kill Ebola?

If you need to clean up after a patient with suspected Ebola, please [contact your local health department](#) for assistance. Anyone who lives in an area not covered by a local health department can [contact their DSHS Health Service Region](#) for information.

How can I protect myself from Ebola?

The best way to prevent any infectious disease is to practice good hygiene. Wash your hands frequently using soap and warm water. If you cannot wash your hands, you can use alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Avoid contact with blood and body fluids of any person, particularly someone who is sick. If you do come into contact with blood or body fluids, wash your hands as soon as possible. Promptly clean items that come into contact with blood or body fluids.

Should I wear a mask and/or gloves?

Neither the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention nor the State of Texas has made this recommendation for the general public.

Am I at a high risk of exposure?

During outbreaks of Ebola, those at highest risk include health care workers treating patients with Ebola and family and friends in close contact with Ebola patients.

How did the nurse become infected? How are healthcare workers protected?

At this time we do not know how the nurse became infected, but there is an ongoing evaluation to determine what transpired so that it can be prevented from happening again.

Hospitals and healthcare workers were provided with recommended protocols from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for what protective equipment they should wear when in contact with an Ebola patient, including how to put it on and remove it.

Dallas Specific Questions

I live in/work in/recently visited Dallas. Am I at risk?

Public health workers have identified people who were in contact with the Ebola patients when they had symptoms. If you were not in direct contact with the patients while they were showing symptoms you are not at risk to contract Ebola from them. Those who

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were in direct contact with the patients are being monitored for symptoms of the disease and will be isolated and receive supportive treatment immediately should they show symptoms. Ebola is not contagious until symptoms appear.

[What is being done to prevent more cases in Dallas?](#)

Public health workers, including those working for Dallas County Health and Human Services, the Texas Department of State Health Services, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are all working together to prevent the spread of this disease. They have worked to identify all people who may have been in contact with the patients once they had symptoms. Public health workers are monitoring those individuals for symptoms, including twice-daily fever checks. By monitoring these people closely, we will be able to isolate them at the first sign of symptoms, and thus prevent further spread of the disease.

While we cannot guarantee that no one else will begin showing symptoms, our investigations and monitoring will assist us in preventing a widespread outbreak.

[I am worried about the patient being treated in a Dallas hospital. Is the hospital safe?](#)

All hospitals have protocols for preventing the spread of infectious diseases. Hospitals have been provided recommended protocols for handling patients with Ebola-like symptoms. There will be an investigation by the hospital and the CDC, among others, to determine how the health care worker was infected, so future infections can be prevented.

Patients who are treated at the same hospital where the patient is receiving treatment are not at risk of contracting Ebola.

[I am worried about the patient having been transported in an ambulance. Is it safe to ride in an ambulance in Dallas?](#)

Ambulance providers regularly handle patients with infectious diseases and have protocols for making the ambulance unit safe for the next patient. Patients who are transported in ambulances in Dallas are not at risk of contracting Ebola. The ambulance that transported the patient to the hospital was removed from service to be decontaminated. The second patient drove her personal vehicle to the hospital.

[My children attend Dallas Public Schools. Are they at risk?](#)

People infected with Ebola are not contagious until they have symptoms. No additional people being monitored have shown symptoms. Children attending Dallas Public Schools are not at risk.